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THE MERRY HEART

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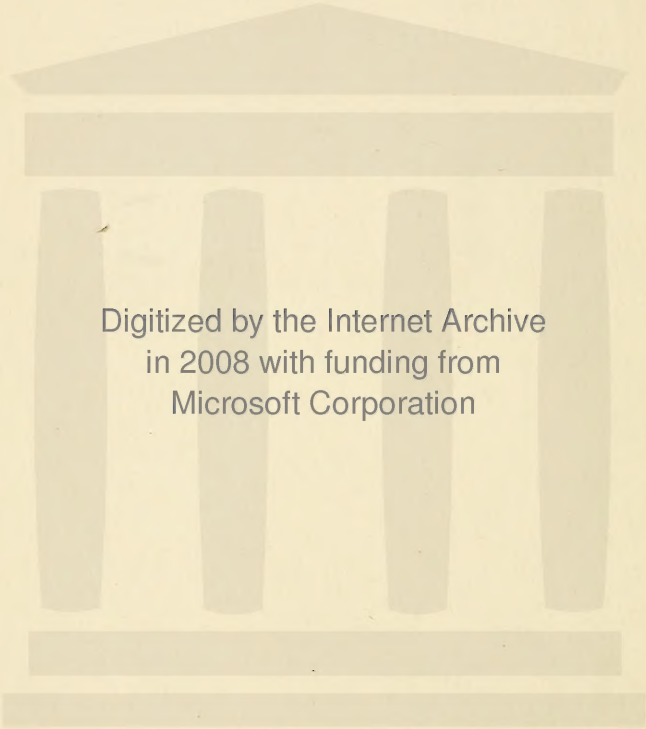
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THE MERRY HEART

"Home!" cried Anne "Myrtle, don t you love it?"

THE MERRY HEART

BY

HELEN RAYMOND ABBOTT

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY MOTHER

HELEN MITCHELL ABBOTT

THE
MERRY HEART

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CHAPTER I

ANNE CAREW was on her way home to the little New England farm-house where her family was waiting to tell her how tedious the summer had been without her. Anne had been working, although Myrtle disliked to hear it called work; to her the thought of tutoring in a wealthy family, where you knew the daughter of the house and could use the automobile at any time of the day, was altogether too alluring a prospect to be masquerading as labor.

Myrtle considered that she had toiled far more than Anne during the last two months. Many odd pieces of work that she had laid by for Anne's coming in June had after all been performed without Anne, owing to the latter's decision to go straight from teaching to tutoring. Myrtle, therefore, felt rather like a martyr. To be sure there was now money enough for the operation on their mother's eyes. Nevertheless, the summer had been tedious.

It was early September now, within two weeks of the time for the opening of the college where Anne was an English instructor. Myrtle reflected that together they could get all the peaches canned and the fall cleaning done before Anne left.

But as Anne stood on the bare, uncovered platform of the station waiting for some one from the farm to drive down to meet her, she was not thinking of house cleaning or the preserving of peaches.

She had a vaguely undefined sense of happiness and thrift as she thought of the hundred dollars which she was bringing home. Her savings in June had been needed for the mortgage and repairs on the house, and Myrtle's final year at boarding-school had been expensive. Now this last money was to be used only for her mother's eyes.

But more definite and pleasurable than this sense of thrift was the thought that at last she herself was free, to travel, to study, to marry if she chose. She flushed a little at this last reflection and looked quite attentively down the road, to see if the carriage was in sight.

Anne invariably had to wait for one of the family to meet her. No one of the Carews was ever known to be on time save Anne herself. Myrtle always explained Anne's punctuality by the careless remark, "Of course —you teach school."

But here at last was Myrtle. Myrtle was the golden-haired doll of the family. From the airiest curl of her flaxen head to the tip of her silly, little fancy shoe, she demonstrated her desire to be admired.

To-day she was looking bewitchingly fresh in a pink dress and a white hat banded with black. Anne noticed when Myrtle drove closer that the hat was a fine Panama. She lifted her suitcase into the light wagon and turned to give a direction about the trunk. She felt her sister's eyes upon her, critical, appraising.

"Your suit is stunning," remarked Myrtle.

Anne laughed and kissed the cheek that Myrtle turned

to her. The younger girl moved over and relinquished the reins. Myrtle seldom drove when there was any one else to do it.

Anne peeled off her traveling gloves and disclosed a pair of brown, well-kept hands. At the sight of a little finger-ring, an odd, twisted affair of silver with a platinum-set diamond, Myrtle exclaimed:

"Anne Carew, what a gorgeous ring! Did Bynner give you that?"

"Genevieve gave it to me," said Anne, a little shortly. "Bynner does n't give me presents, Myrtle, so please get that out of your head."

"Anne, don't try to discipline me as you do your students," Myrtle said, flushing. "There is no reason why Genevieve's brother should n't give you things. He has the money, and you have the looks."

"Myrtle, if that is the kind of thing school has taught you, I wasted my money."

"You need n't remind me that it was yours, Anne." The girl's tone was a little bitter.

"Oh, it 's all in the family history." Anne had her voice well under control. "I help you, you help Mildred. You must n't let it trouble you."

Myrtle's face cleared as quickly as it had clouded. Small details seldom ruffled her for long. Myrtle's methods of obtaining what she wanted were so peaceful and roundabout that Anne frequently found herself surprised when Myrtle brought some matter of household discussion to a triumphant conclusion for herself, without in the least altering the sweetness of her tone or losing the charming equanimity that so irritated her younger sister Mildred.

This business of helping Mildred with her education

was not a particularly appealing one to Myrtle. She was fair enough to acknowledge her own debt to Anne, but she could not convince herself that actual labor on her own part would be required to pay that debt back in full. Anne's ring attracted her now, and she dismissed the unpleasant topic of earning her own bread, to turn her attention to the pretty bit of jewelry. Myrtle dearly loved the sparkle of precious stones.

She leaned over and slipped the ring from Anne's finger to her own. It was large for her, and she changed it to the third finger, gazing at it in delight as she turned her hand back and forth.

"Why do I always like other people's things better than my own?" Her frankness was disarming.

"Rings suit you," Anne said gently.

"My manicure is spoiled," Myrtle mourned. "We 've all worked frightfully hard this summer. Does n't this look like an engagement ring, Anne? Which reminds me, your faithful Edward will call upon you this evening. Is he still waiting for you, or did you give him up last year?"

Anne laughed a little. She did not always answer Myrtle's questions.

"So you 've worked frightfully hard? What 's been the matter?"

"Oh, it 's always the same in summer," the girl replied fretfully. "You escaped it—that 's all. Mother can't do very much at present of course. I tell you it was a change from boarding-school."

"How is mother?" asked Anne, quickly, ignoring the last remark.

"Well enough, only her eyes are bad. One eye is all covered now, and it will soon be ripe for the operation.

That 's what Edward said, 'ripe.' Don't you loathe the word?'' Myrtle shivered. Then she went on: ''Edward has been splendid. He has come in from the city once or twice a week, and just kept watch over mother as if she belonged to him.''

''Is mother's case really as bad as that?'' Anne was alarmed.

''Mercy, no. I think he liked to come. It 's been cool and nice out here, and there 's always something to eat. You want to grab your devoted swain, and do it quick. He 's very susceptible. Now you don't approve of me. I can tell by your mouth. Is it my English or my sentiments? Nay, nay, let 's talk of Anne. Have you had a pleasant summer, you lady of leisure? You 've hardly said a word.''

''A very nice summer, but I haven't been a lady of leisure. I have done one thing, though, that you'll very likely be interested in. I 've found a splendid opening for you next year. They are waiting now for your testimonials and photograph. It 's work with little children, just what you like, and when you help Mildred with that physical-training school, you 'll find yourself more independent in this place than almost any place I know. You get your board, you see, and—why, what 's the matter?'' Anne had been too enthusiastic to notice Myrtle's face slowly clouding. Her expression became hostile. She turned Anne's ring around her finger and pouted.

''But there 's loads of work to be done at home this winter,'' she objected.

''You don't like housework,'' Anne reminded her, a little shrewdly. ''Moreover, my dear, if you really want to help Mildred, you have a much finer chance to do it.

You know Milly will want to be going away in another year, and she just must get the physical culture she has set her heart on."

"Anne, you rule things with a higher hand every time you come home. I just hate to be managed." Myrtle's tone was rebellious.

Anne made no reply, but her eyes were troubled. At the turn of the road, brown and low and homelike, the Carew farm-house could be seen, faintly touched by the pink light of the low sun.

"Home!" cried Anne. "And I have n't seen it since Easter. Myrtle, don't you love it?"

"You don't see it as much as I do," answered the girl, carelessly.

"Then accept a winter position away," laughed Anne, as she drew up at the door.

Myrtle jumped down from the light cart, and tossed her head impatiently.

"You are a regular school-teacher," she said.

Anne saw her mother standing at the side door, a fresh white apron over her black dress, her head bent forward a little as if she listened to what she could not see. The elder daughter scanned the thin face anxiously.

"Are you well, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, quite well," Mrs. Carew said, and drew Anne into the house, and then gently pushed her into a chair by the western window. As the older woman's face came close to Anne's in the almost embarrassing scrutiny to which Mrs. Carew subjected her daughter, Anne noticed the new little wrinkles of fretfulness about her mother's eyes and mouth. Mrs. Carew was a sweet-faced woman with a complaining voice. Her light hair, faded by much artificial waving, and her round blue eyes, curiously out

of harmony with her fretful face, seemed a painful prophecy of what Myrtle would one day be like.

Mildred came in before Anne could ask or tell any of the many things that seemed to crowd for recognition. Mildred was unlike either of her sisters. Her gray eyes, set far apart, were frankly watchful, sometimes critical, lit by a sparkle that betrayed her unfailing sense of humor. For a sixteen-year-old she was a rare observer, and it was Anne's cross that Mildred frequently found her fun in a keen enjoyment of other people's shortcomings.

Nobody at home seemed happy. Mildred's welcome was joyous, but it had a hungry, eager appeal in it that worried Anne. Mildred sat down on the little chair near Anne and put her feet on the very shabby couch.

"Oh, but we 've had an awful summer," she sighed.

"Mildred, do take your feet down," Anne rebuked mildly.

Mildred gave an extra kick, then tipped far back, and blew an imaginary ring of smoke. After that she winked at Anne, who watched unsmilingly, and then resumed her natural position.

"Nobody cares," she explained.

"You are n't a lady when you act like that." Anne tried to be gentle.

"H'm, I 'm not a lady anyway. I 've had to work from five in the morning till seven at night. Catch Myrtle doing anything she can put off on me."

"We 've certainly missed you, Anne," said her mother, a little querulously. Then she added, "Of course I was glad you were out of it all, dear."

"Was it any harder than summers always are?"

"We had extra men for haying." It was Mildred

who spoke. "That was all that was different. And, oh, Anne, we had the best-looking fellow!" The girl's voice grew bright with reminiscence. "He took me to the band concert in the city one night and he said—" Mildred suddenly stopped. Anne's face was not sympathetic. "Myrtle did n't care," she defended, flushing.

Mrs. Carew spoke then with a trace of defiance.

"Myrtle always has a good time, and you may too. You are old enough."

Anne bit her lip. Then she leaned over and put an arm about Mildred.

"We will give you a good time yet, dear. You will trust me, and mind me, won't you?"

"Of course. I knew it would be all right when you got home. Gracious, there 's Myrtle now, and I have n't got the table set." Mildred gave Anne's hand a squeeze, and departed noisily.

"Well, what 's the matter?" demanded Mrs. Carew.

"Why?" said Anne, lightly.

"You sighed."

"It 's a habit, I guess," answered Anne as she rose to take care of her things before supper-time. "If it is n't, it will be," she added to herself, as she toiled up the narrow stairs with her suitcase.

CHAPTER II

THE room was not particularly attractive as she opened the door, although a soft radiance from the west toned down its ugliness a little. The bare floor needed paint, and the mirror, even in the dim light, showed a blurred, cracked surface that made Anne sigh for the luxuries of Genevieve's home. The muslin curtains hung stringily at the windows, which were unscreened and soiled with the results of many battles between the flies and some unknown enemy, who had evidently come out victorious.

Anne smoothed her hair in front of the clouded glass, and looked in the pitcher for fresh water, but there was none. As she took it up and went down the back stairs to the kitchen, she heard Mildred's voice raised in argument.

"I don't care; it 's mean to dress all up and prink for somebody else's man. You would n't catch me doing it."

"You crazy child,"—it was Myrtle speaking,—"Edward will never look at me when Anne is around."

"Well, he looks at you plenty now," was the hot rejoinder.

Anne stopped on the stairs, half-way down, and held tight to the big white pitcher. For just one minute her heart seemed to contract; then she went calmly on. Many experiences that loom large on the stage or in fiction can be managed very quietly in real life.

"Oh, Anne, I meant to take up the water," apologized Mildred.

"I told her to," said Myrtle. "You 'll find life rather different from what you 've had, but then we all have to stand things I suppose."

"Oh, I don't mind." Anne's voice trembled a very little. "I haven't had a very easy time this summer, as I see I have to remind you."

"Isn't Genevieve very rich?" The question was almost defiant.

"I was a paid dependent," Anne said, smiling.

"Ugh!" Myrtle shrugged her shoulders. "You put things in the ugliest way, Anne."

Anne had started for the stairs.

"Don't change your dress," called Myrtle. "Supper is almost ready."

"But be sure you change it," added Mildred. "Edward is coming, you know, and Myrtle has a new frock. Bought it with the calf," added the girl, wickedly.

"You translate everything into farms and produce," cried Myrtle, whose sense of humor did not correspond to her younger sister's.

Anne did not turn in answer to either of them, but she smiled despite herself to hear Mildred retort, "Well, I 've been wearing not quite four cans of milk on my head since May, and you used the whole strawberry bed."

"Poor little Mildred," Anne thought, for thirty cans would not buy her own summer hat. Something must be wrong with her. And Edward was coming that very night, before she had accustomed herself to her own family. She went up the stairs very slowly, finding the pitcher heavy, and her head rather heavy, too, after the trip and the excitement.

Supper dragged unaccountably, and Anne felt that the family emphasized in every speech the contrast between her own prosperous summer and the monotonous drudgery of the farm. She began to feel a definite annoyance, which grew alarmingly in one short hour. It had been her first summer away from home since her freshman year at college, and she had been teaching four years. Now, somehow, she had eased herself with the thought that Myrtle would help Mildred, and that she would be free. The chains seemed rather to be tightening. Suddenly she seemed to see long years of teaching stretching into the distance. A year of travel, as Dean Weston had recommended, and an increased salary! How she had pondered upon the two possibilities for the next summer! For there had been another plan which might mean that she would never travel. Edward was not rich, and it takes a doctor a long time to get famous. But the argument in the kitchen had made her feel heavy and worried. Money might not be the only thing that Myrtle would demand.

At present Myrtle's eyes were on Anne's undeniably well-fitting clothes.

"I have n't a thing," she said covetously.

"Where did you spend all your allowance?" Anne tried not to be critical.

"That?" said Myrtle scornfully. "Why, in May I had to write home to mother for more besides the extra that you sent me."

"And after that she let me buy a forty-cent flower for a last year's hat," put in Mildred.

"My little income seems smaller each year," sighed Mrs. Carew. "I have always wanted to do more for my girls."

"Nobody does anything for me just because I live at home," cried Mildred. Then she caught herself up shamefacedly. Perhaps it was Anne's expression. "Anne, I was a mean old thing to say that. You 've been a dear."

"Myrtle does n't need more than I give her." Anne went back to the original subject, paying no attention to Mildred. "I had no allowance at all when I was working my way through college." A contrite thought made her turn to her mother. "You were not well then, dear, and could n't help."

Mrs. Carew did not notice the contrition. Her voice was reproachful.

"Anne, you are getting so hard. When you have children of your own, you 'll understand real sacrifice."

"She 'll never be able to have any children to sacrifice for, if she keeps on supporting us," interrupted Mildred, with sudden acuteness.

"I have never kept Anne from marrying," Myrtle said haughtily.

"Any one but Edward would have given up waiting," persisted Mildred. Then at some thought she bit her lip and addressed herself to her meal.

"I don't believe Anne is sure of her own mind," smiled Mrs. Carew, gently placating. She was like many mothers who like to think their daughter has but to crook a finger.

"I 'm the only member of the English faculty who has n't done any traveling or studying since graduation," Anne said a little irrelevantly, and stirred her tea quite as if there were sugar and cream in it.

"I don't believe in all this studying just for a few

more letters on your name,'' Mrs. Carew remarked with some severity.

''It puts a few hundred dollars more on your salary,'' commented Anne, dryly. ''Dean Weston is sure that there will be an important vacancy next year and has been talking to me about it. I 'd need at least a year to prepare.'' She paused and looked at Myrtle. ''It would mean a salary of eleven hundred, besides my board. Then in a little while I should get more.''

''Anne,'' cried Myrtle, ''surely you told him you would.''

''But it means travel,'' insisted Anne, quizzically. ''Several months in the Lake country and a thorough course at a large college.''

''But you would like that,'' said Myrtle, generously. ''And we would get along.''

''It sounds very promising,'' agreed Mrs. Carew.

''And then would you come back and teach and teach forever, just so I could go to training-school?'' Mildred's tone was not soft, but her eyes glowed with understanding. ''H'm, I 'll go off and support myself if Myrtle won't help.''

Anne rose from the table and helped her mother get settled for the evening. Then she came to Mildred, as the girl was noisily piling dishes.

''Don't ever 'go off' to be out of the way, dear,'' she said, and rubbed her cheek softly against the little sister's. ''I 'll see if something can't be done.''

Mildred put down the bread plate suddenly and flung an impulsive arm about Anne's neck.

''Anne, you 're the dearest thing, but you sha'n't work for us always. I know you want to get married. I—''

"Why, Mildred Carew," cried Myrtle, from the door. "Who ever heard of telling anybody that they wanted to be married!"

"Absurd, is n't it?" rejoined Anne. "Of course nobody does."

"I don't care. Anne knows what I mean," Mildred said stoutly, and they went on with the dishes quite peacefully, while Anne told them interesting scraps about her summer vacation, which she was obliged to repeat for her mother's benefit whenever the laughter reached the sitting-room.

That evening Myrtle came in and sat on Anne's bed while the latter dressed. Myrtle was wearing a lacy white frock which Anne had never seen, but which she imagined was the dress that Mildred had referred to.

"Panama hats and Paris frocks?" she asked lightly.

Myrtle flushed.

"I knew you did n't care as long as we did n't get into debt," she said. "I knew you did n't like it at the table to-night when I talked money, but truly, I 've made one dollar do the work of three all winter."

"We all have to," said Anne soberly, as she put in the last hairpin and began to look for her nail polish.

"Anne, you are so queer and quiet," Myrtle pouted.

Her sister slipped a dress over her head carefully, and then laughed, but the laugh did not ring true.

"I don't feel hilarious," she said. "Mildred's little remark made when I first came, about a chance acquaintance she had picked up, mother's feeling about the money, your apparent inability to get along with all I can give you, and the fact that you have evidently made no plans to help Mildred, who simply must have her education—I don't mean to be critical as soon as I

get home, but I can't do everything." Anne was aware that the trouble looming nearest had not been voiced. Her lip quivered, and she turned away toward the crooked little mirror.

Myrtle was touched for the moment.

"Mildred's friend is a perfectly all-right boy," she began reasonably. "In fact his family is quite good, so Christine says. You know the mayor of Lincoln worked as a hired man once, and I think *he 's* stunning! We saw him in the political rally last fall. He used to work for Uncle George, mother says."

"Enough of the mayor of Lincoln," begged Anne.

"Well, as for me," Myrtle evidently did not dislike turning the conversation to herself, "I 'll stay at home, and Mildred can go to school. I have it all thought out so we won't have to have Aunt Lydia here at all to take care of mother. I didn't like to tell you all about it as soon as you got here, but I know we can fix it. And, besides—"

"But who will pay for Mildred if you are n't earning anything at all?" faltered Anne. She despised herself for her seeming thrift, but Myrtle could dissolve air-castles quite complacently.

To tell the truth, however, she did not meet Anne's eyes as she answered.

"I—I thought if I did the work, for nothing, you know, then Mil could have what I used to have."

Anne had turned squarely from the glass during this speech, and now she felt her own voice growing intense with bitterness.

"Myrtle, ever since you were a little girl, you always said that if I 'd help you, you would help Mildred. And when you wanted to go to that private school where

Christine was, we all agreed that you would n't be able to earn as much afterward. I never wanted you to go to Mrs. Lathrop's, but you declared you could do kindergarten work when you graduated. Now you have shifted it all on to my shoulders."

"But I 'm willing to do the work at home," repeated Myrtle, a little weakly.

Anne moved the light a trifle.

"Myrtle, is there some special reason why you want to be at home?"

"Why, of course not," Myrtle answered carelessly, but she stirred under her sister's searching gaze.

"Let 's go down," said Anne, shortly. "The windows are n't screened, I notice, and I had to raise them all. I can hear mosquitoes all over the room."

Myrtle trailed her fluffy whiteness down the stairs ahead of Anne.

At the foot of the flight she paused, and then slipped through the side door to the lawn.

"I want some pink asters," she explained.

Anne went to the sitting-room where Mrs. Carew was sitting. Mildred had walked out, she said.

"Alone?" asked Anne, quickly.

"No, with that young man I told you about." Mrs. Carew's tone was placid.

"Mother, did you ever meet him?"

"No, but Myrtle knows him, so it 's all right."

Anne seated herself near her mother and took one thin hand.

"You think me such a crank, don't you?" she said softly.

"Oh, no," answered Mrs. Carew. "I wanted to know, too, of course, but Myrtle told us all about him."

Anne sighed and put back the hand.

"We have enough money for the operation on your eyes," she began again.

"That 's good. I wish these things would get ready quick, though. The waiting is making me nervous. I can't see anything hardly. I expect my table manners troubled you, but I can't help it. It 's awful to be so helpless. But thank you for the money," she added awkwardly. "Edward told Myrtle he 'd make it as cheap as he could. Here they come now."

Myrtle was approaching with Edward, her hands destitute of flowers, her eyes laughing up at him quite as if unaware that he was coming to see Anne, whom he had not seen for many months. Anne noticed involuntarily that he drew farther away from Myrtle as they entered the soft circle of lamplight.

CHAPTER III

ANNE felt a tide of rebellion sweep her suddenly from head to foot. Myrtle had intended to meet Edward all the time. Myrtle, who knew he had been her sister's lover, was taking him for hers. She could hardly find voice to greet him, but he met her without embarrassment. She wondered if he had even guessed the little drama which was going on. It seemed good to hear him speak again.

By the light of the one meager sitting-room lamp, Edward scanned Anne's face frankly. He was a tall, dark-haired, smooth-shaven fellow, slow of speech and unfailingly courteous. One sensed, without knowing why, that he might at times be unbelievably stupid, but that he would be forgiven because of his obvious goodness.

"You are tired," he said in an almost professional manner; then he added jokingly, "and a little mad. You see, I know you, Anne. Own up, what 's the matter?"

He released her hand then, and seated himself on the couch. Myrtle sat in a little rocking-chair near her mother, with the lamplight falling on her soft hair. Once she bent and arranged Mrs. Carew's shawl.

Anne did not go over to the couch. She sat stiffly in a tall uncomfortable chair, where the yellow light fell full upon her tired face. Anne was twenty-six, and she looked it that night.

They talked about many things, the hard summer, for one, and then they asked Anne if she was n't glad she escaped the heat; they spoke of the many farmers who were buying automobiles, and then asked Anne if she could drive one. Myrtle looked surprised and a little envious when Anne owned to having a license. In the afternoon Anne would have explained that it made her freer to take her charges where she willed, but somehow this evening she let them think what they liked.

How the evening went, Anne never knew, but finally Mrs. Carew rose, and Myrtle got up at once, although Anne fancied that she and Edward exchanged a glance before the girl left the room.

When they had gone, the main prop of the house of Carew felt an almost overwhelming desire to cry. She only brushed a stray lock out of her eyes and asked Edward how his practice was.

"My chronic indigestion case is cured," he laughed. "Anyway, I did it myself instead of letting another doctor get the credit. There 's a good income gone." He shook his head drolly at the old joke between himself and Anne. Anne laughed too.

"Poor Edward, better come down where I teach. No one ever gets well there."

"Does no one ever stop teaching there?" he asked, but the note of friendly badinage which Anne read into his voice was not the old teasing insistence, of tenderness hardly concealed, which she once listened to. Edward plainly did not care.

She answered his question.

"I 'm thinking of taking a year off and traveling."

"With me?"

How did he dare?

"No, alone." Anne's tone was just sufficiently light and careless.

"And what will the little sister do?"

"Mildred? Oh she 'll be away at school."

"No, I meant Myrtle." Edward corrected himself a little awkwardly.

"Oh, Myrtle will stay here I suppose, unless she marries."

"It 's pretty hard on a girl of her age to be kept here," mused Edward.

"I really don't see what I can do about it." Anne's tone was hard.

"Anne, your heart is entirely in your work, is n't it?" Anne moved the shade to the lamp, but still finding it unsatisfactory, took another chair. It was the one that Myrtle had been sitting in.

"Now, I 'm going to talk to you," she heard him say, with determination in his sure young voice. "I don't want you to keep on throwing down men as you 've thrown me down." Anne knew that there would come a time when she would smile at that, but somehow just then she could not, with Edward before her, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his gray eyes fixed on her.

"It is n't right, Anne, the way you throw aside everything for your work. Do you remember two years ago," his voice dropped a little, "when I asked you to marry me?"

"To marry you?" Anne echoed.

"Perhaps I did n't say it that way, but you knew what I meant." Anne stored away another chance for a future smile, yet this was very hard. Edward had changed, and she missed the lover whom she used to know.

"All you could say was that you could n't leave teach-

ing then. You said you must help Myrtle, too, but surely she has n't been much of a hindrance, she is so capable. Then last year when I wanted you, you would talk of nothing but Myrtle's senior year at The Heights and your mother's eyes."

"Well, Myrtle is off 'The Heights' now," said Anne, whimsically, "and I have the money for the operation on mother's eyes."

"Now you are free, and you tell me you are going to travel."

Anne could not trust herself to speak.

"Don't think I 'm belittling what you 've done, but I can see now that you are not in love with me and never will be."

"Well, we were never engaged, so there 's nothing to break," Anne smiled bravely at him.

He rose.

"Anne, this need n't have been."

She rose too, but she did not answer him. She could not realize that he had taken this way to be free. In her heart she knew that at that moment he was capable of loving either her or Myrtle equally well. She did not accuse Edward even to herself of being fickle, but she realized afresh what Lucille Bernays had told her once. "There is no such thing as destiny. A man could have loved a dozen girls other than the one he married, only he did n't have a chance to meet them with the stage set for romance. Some girls set their own stages, and these invariably succeed. Some are naturally surrounded by luck with the things that make a man want to come again. Those are just stage properties. Who has the better chance, the girl with the boarding-house parlor, or the girl whose hospitable family light up the

big fireplace and set the victrola going? Anne, there is no such thing as the kind of love you 'd like to believe in." Anne remembered the words now and unconsciously added to herself: "Myrtle is the girl who sets her own stage for herself. She will succeed, too." Yet why should she step back and let Myrtle succeed?

The years to come looked dull and gray just then. With a word she could bring him back. And afterward, long afterward, it would not matter that she lost her pride and called him; nothing would matter except that she would be happy. That was it, would she be happy with a man who could cast her off thus easily? Was he worth telling the truth to? What would he say to a woman who brazenly told him that she loved him? Far better Myrtle's way. What had Myrtle's way been?

Yet again she realized her inconsistence in blaming him because she could not tell him fairly that he was the man she would choose. There was something wickedly unjust in the social etiquette that would allow her to accept attentions from Bynner Merrick, who, she knew, wanted to marry her, and yet forbade her to tell Edward either about Bynner or her own feeling in the matter. How could a man ever accuse a girl of not playing fair? Men assumed all the prerogatives and none of the risk.

"Since I am sure that you do not love me, and you are sure that I do not love you, suppose we part friends as they do in books." Anne gave him her hand. And to both of them there came the memory of once, only once, when he had kissed her. The memory of that kiss was still a vitally throbbing thing to Anne, and yet with a curious stoicism she had refused to allow herself to think about it. Already at twenty-six the feeling was strong in her that the thing over which she brooded in delight

would not be the thing which she would be allowed to have. So the kiss had never made the slightest difference in her behavior toward Edward, although they were both aware of the fact that it might some day sit like a little ghost between them.

In his way he would be loyal. It would be a long time before he would speak to Myrtle. "And I might have made a terrible mistake this evening," thought Anne as she waited in the quiet hall to be quite sure of herself before she met Myrtle. They could probably talk about Anne's trip abroad the following summer, and Myrtle would say that there was the one thing she had longed to do for years, but Anne had always been the fortunate one. As she turned to ascend the stairs, Anne heard a rush in the hall, and she was besieged by a pair of eager arms, and Mildred's happy voice.

"Anne, I 've had the most exciting evening. Herbert Gray is going to take me to Hammerton to the big glee club concert. Don't tell mother or Myrtle, but he tried to kiss me, Anne. And I would n't let him because I knew you would n't approve. It is so nice to have you home. I think I shall be angelically good for a while."

Anne looked down at her with shining eyes. Sometimes Anne's eyes looked gray, but to-night they were very blue and a little mysterious, as if they held a secret that was not used to being there.

"That 's right, dear, always be careful. I must see this fine young man who tries to kiss my little sister."

"Anne," cried Mildred, archly, from the step below her on the stairs, "were you never kissed?"

"It did n't mean much when I was young," said Anne.

CHAPTER IV

ANNE turned from Mildred's eager gaiety and went swiftly up the stairs.

"I 'm too tired to talk any more to-night," she called back as she reached the landing and saw Mildred still looking after her.

"Well, I like that. I was in the middle of a sentence."

"You generally are." Anne's light laugh sounded forced. "Come to bed, Mildred; it 's late."

"I hope you would n't call this late," sniffed Mildred, scornfully.

Anne went on up the stairs without replying. She heard Mildred open the screen door and step out on the front porch. Then she heard the girl's clear voice as she began calling her pet kitten.

The moon streamed in through the narrow window at the end of the hall. Anne stifled a sigh as she stood for a moment looking out upon the quiet road. Edward must be half way to the village by now. Edward had never seemed so grave and serious as he had to-night. No wonder, when he had it on his mind that it was time to be off with the old love before he might be on with the new. Anne was aware of a weight on her heart as she stood and looked out upon the moonlit road. What Lucille had said was all very well, but Lucille had forgotten one thing. Even though there may be many

possibilities for romance, yet to a girl like Anne, the letting down of a certain barrier of reserve to one man and one only, closed the door to the rest of the world.

Mildred danced through the lower hall, singing a popular song of love and summer nights and some plaintive maiden who was waiting, waiting, till Anne gave a little disdainful shrug and leaned over the banisters.

"Sh—sh," she warned. "Mother is probably asleep."

"No, I 'm not," contradicted Mrs. Carew's high voice. "Has Edward gone?"

Anne walked softly down the hall and stood in the doorway of her mother's room.

"Yes; he went early," she said in a low tone. Then she added, smiling at the thought of some of the nights at Genevieve's, "Although he was never a particularly late caller."

"He? He stayed till after twelve one night this spring. I nearly went down in my bath robe and sent him home." Mrs. Carew spoke with energy. Her dim eyes turned toward Anne, where she stood in the yellow light of the kerosene lamp that had been left on a stand by the door.

"Are you ever going to marry that boy?"

Anne tightened her lips and then she laughed merrily.

"Mercy, no. I may reserve him for the family though."

Her mother put up an impatient hand and readjusted her pillow. Her face, under the tightly twisted curl papers, looked old and petulant.

"I don't pretend to understand the young people of to-day. You and Ed have been goin' with each other off and on for ten years. Though the land knows who 'll take care of me if you ever marry and stop work. I 've

got money enough for myself, but I can't support you girls too, and Mildred can't earn what you do. No use to count on Myrtle for anything, ever."

"I sha'n't marry yet," Anne said gently. It hurt her to note the change in her mother in the last months.

"No; that 's what you say. That 's what Myrtle says, but she 's in there cryin', and I don't know what it 's about if it ain't a man. I heard Mildred tell her if she 'd have let him alone it would have been all right."

"Myrtle crying?" echoed Anne.

Mrs. Carew paused.

"I suppose I should n't have told you," she said in a different voice. "I would n't know anything about it," she added.

"All right, I won't. Good night, Mother."

"Are you going so soon?"

"Yes; you know I 'm a famous sleeper," the girl answered lightly. She stooped and kissed her mother's cheek.

"You may take the light," Mrs. Carew commanded. "I think I shall go to sleep. It 's nice to have you at home, Anne."

"I 'm so glad," Anne's grateful answer came from the doorway where she stood with the lamp in her hand. "That makes everything easier. Good night."

Anne paused at her own door; then she scanned the long corridor at the end of which were the rooms where Myrtle and Mildred slept. So Myrtle was crying? She put the lamp down on a little old-fashioned stand just outside her door. Then she walked on to Myrtle's room. The door was closed, but a finger of light slanted across the hall carpet.

Anne knocked and stood with bent head listening.

Then she started a little, for Myrtle's voice was full of bright welcome as she called out a cheerful "Come in."

"I just want to say good night," ventured Anne, awkwardly.

"Are you ready for bed so soon?" Myrtle was sitting by the window with a new magazine. Her hair was down and fell about her face in a kind of halo as seen through the light of the lamp in its stand just above her head. Her kimono of orange silk with green birds skimming gaily about it, her little orange slippers with their enormous pompons, the laciness of her night robe as it fell daringly away from her smooth young neck, all seemed to Anne sufficient evidence of the influence which The Heights had had upon Myrtle's tastes. Even Genevieve's clothes seemed quieter than Myrtle's. Everything of Myrtle's talked more loudly than it would on other people.

"Well, Anne," Myrtle's voice was well under control. There was no curiosity in it, but only a little touch of the fine lady, which Myrtle affected now and then.

Anne flushed. Then she came in and closed the door that their voices might not disturb their mother. She must tell Myrtle about Edward. This was the natural time to do it, and the postponement would only make it look as if Anne really cared too much about him to be frank. Anne's pride forbade Myrtle's knowing that she would ever have accepted Edward. Yet she felt that she could not rest until she was sure that Myrtle actually loved him and that he had given her reason for thinking that he might care for her some time. Actual intimacy between the two sisters had not been possible lately, and Anne wondered now if it could be her fault. To-night, at all events, she would try as she had never

tried before to show Myrtle that she stood ready to listen to her and help her. Myrtle's guilty eyes as she withdrew from Anne's direct question earlier in the evening, haunted the older sister now. Obviously that was not the way to win Myrtle's confidence. Well, it was all changed now, and there was no longer any need to ask why Myrtle wished to be at home. She could still see the look on her sister's face as she and Edward came in from the garden that evening. It had almost said: "He is mine. Take him if you can." No wonder it had been hard to talk naturally to Edward afterward. No wonder she had succumbed to such a petty triumph as the narrative of some of her summer adventures.

"Anne! You are the most solemn-looking individual. And your pin is unfastened at your throat."

Anne reached up mechanically.

"Edward has gone," she said in an inconsequential way, as if for the lack of other conversation she was offering this obvious bit.

Myrtle raised her eyebrows.

"So?" she said. She had roomed with a girl at the Heights who had said "So?" and she was cultivating it.

Anne was suddenly irritated. Her good resolution was forgotten.

"Stop playing the fine lady," she said bruskly.

But Myrtle only laughed. She was not to be managed that way.

"Where is your ring, Anne?" she asked pleasantly.

"My ring?"

"I mean your engagement ring."

"I am not engaged, as you well know."

"That was what I thought. Mildred would have it that Edward was just waiting for this night. Mildred

is getting very romantic since her last beau appeared on the scene."

"Mildred is too young for lovers."

"Oh, Anne, every girl has a little fun. You never did, but that was because Edward was always around." She stopped suddenly as if she had said more than she meant.

"Yes, he was always around then," Anne repeated with peculiar emphasis.

"You think he has changed?" Myrtle did not look at Anne. She only fluttered the leaves of the magazine.

"I think so, yes," Anne said bravely.

"Anne, I want to be fair." Myrtle put down the book and clasped her hands tight. "I did go into the garden for asters, and I did n't intend to meet Edward. I had not heard his car at all."

"Why should you explain that? Any one might meet a friend like that."

"Oh, Mildred thought I was quite a villain. Stealing your lover, and so forth, à la moving pictures."

"Mildred is a little impetuous." Nevertheless Anne smiled lovingly as she spoke.

"But that is n't what I started to say. Of course it was no matter that I met him, except that I thought you noticed it. The important part was that he thought I was you at first. You remember it was quite dark. He certainly was glad to see you, Anne, till he discovered his mistake."

Anne caught her breath.

"Did he kiss you?" she asked before she could stop herself.

"Of course not." Myrtle gave Anne a quick look of surprise, and the other bit her lip. "But there are other ways a man may show you he 's pretty glad to see you."

"Yes, of course. That was a silly question anyway. Only you looked so self-conscious."

"I can't help how you think I look, Anne. I'm all through talking." Myrtle's tone was virtuous. "Mildred can't say I have n't told you everything."

"But I don't really see the point." Anne was puzzled.

"The point is that you treated Edward as if he were a complete stranger, and Mildred and I don't consider him that at all."

"Why, Myrtle! I was just the same as ever." Anne sounded all at once a little stricken. Had she been quite fair after all?

"You may call it the same, but I know from the way Edward acted to me in the garden that he was crazy to see you. He never looked at *me* that way." This last came in a passionate outburst that shocked Anne into silence. Listening to Myrtle and helping her was harder than it had appeared at first.

As for Myrtle, she had a feeling that she was being very heroic and quite like the girls in novels. She loved Edward, or liked to think that she did, and she was experiencing a strange mixture of pain and pleasure in thus finding out what Anne intended to do in regard to him. It had sounded very brave to reproach Anne for treating him coldly, when the thought of their possible engagement made her heart sink. At the end of her last speech she had been stricken with self-pity, and had flaunted her secret to Anne's face. She knew that Anne was shocked, and she recognized also an awkward groping out in the older sister toward a mutual sympathy that had never been theirs before. Then in Anne's face she saw the dawn of a resolve. Anne was going to tell

her whatever there was to tell, but in the elder sister's narrowed, rather quizzical eyes, Myrtle could not get anything to add to the words which Anne vouchsafed her. Anne was lifting one curtain and dropping another at the same time, and only the meager scene between was to be free for Myrtle to inspect.

"I am never going to be engaged to him," Anne suddenly announced.

"Did you tell him so to-night?" Myrtle asked after a pause.

"Yes; I felt that he was fretting a little under bonds which did not need to gall him at all. I wanted him to understand that I did not expect anything from him and that he need not expect anything from me. I hope he was relieved." This last did not sound like Anne somehow. It was this touch of bitterness that Myrtle instantly noticed.

"You are in love with him all the same."

"No, I don't think I am," Anne said after a moment. "I don't believe I could give up the man I really loved as easily as this."

"It will be worse when you have time to think about it," Myrtle told her so wisely that Anne opened her eyes a little. Myrtle's head dropped, her lips quivered, and then she drew a quick breath and buried her face in her hands.

"Don't look at me, Anne," she begged in a stifled voice. "You have n't any sympathy for a girl like me." And with this she began to cry, quietly at first, but rather stormily after a minute. Anne knew that it was partly grief and partly self-pity. She put out her hand and smoothed the shining hair.

"Don't cry, dear," she said gently.

"I have n't done one thing I am ashamed of," Myrtle suddenly burst out between sobs. "Mildred says I have n't played fair, but I have."

Anne's soothing hand did not pause.

"Do you mean about Edward?" she asked in her quietest voice.

"Yes."

"Well, he is quite free, so you need not feel so badly dear. Only—are you sure of yourself?"

"How could I be till I knew he wanted me?" demanded the younger girl, looking up through her tears with such naïveté that Anne smiled. It was a tremulous little smile, but it helped.

"Do you know, now?"

"I should say not. Specially after what happened in the garden."

"I never did find out exactly what happened in the garden," murmured Anne. Then she rose and began to undo the lace in the front of her dress. "Stop crying, Myrtle," she said cheerfully. "Things will all work out for both of us. You 've been frank to-night, and I appreciate it." It was a set little speech, but it was Anne's best effort.

Down the corridor came Mildred's flying feet. Myrtle started up in alarm.

"I won't let her in. Good night, Myrtle." She patted the girl's shoulder, and then as if half afraid, she dropped a light kiss on Myrtle's soft hair, after which, without waiting for a response, she slipped out of the door just in time to intercept Mildred who demanded entrance.

"You would n't talk to me, but you 'll talk up here," she accused Anne indignantly.

"Children were n't invited to this meeting. Patter right along to bed."

"Are you tired, Anne?"

Anne nodded without speaking.

"Good night," said Mildred, with surprising quietness. And finding Anne's cheek wet when she kissed her in the dim hall, Mildred showed her wisdom by saying nothing.

CHAPTER V

AT the breakfast table Mrs. Carew was noticeably cheerful. She discussed the latest gossip of the town, the weather, Anne's new way of doing her hair, which she had just been able to see in the clear morning light, and finally she came gently round to the mention of Edward, through the medium of a narration concerning Myrtle and one Gerald Fales, whom the girl had encouraged to call, much to Edward's disgust.

"He has n't any use for young Mr. Fales," Mrs. Carew finished, and her tone was complacent as she added, "It 's a comfort to have Edward take such an interest."

"It is indeed," murmured Anne, in the general direction of the cream-pitcher.

"He did n't stay so terribly long last night," Mildred ventured curiously.

For once Myrtle came to the rescue.

"Anne was tired and sent him away," she said calmly.

Myrtle was looking unusually well this morning. She had a high color, and her pink morning dress was of the daintiest. Hardly practical for what was to be done, Anne thought to herself, though she tried not to be critical. Myrtle was almost too pretty to find fault with.

"We sweep to-day, I understand," Anne announced briskly as soon as breakfast was over.

"Where 'd you get your information?" yawned Mil-

dred, who hated to get started, but worked like a little Trojan once she was roused from her lethargy.

"Oh, Myrtle says you 've left lots to do till I got home."

"We don't care if we don't sweep and scour all day long," Myrtle contributed, half repentant as she heard Anne's frank remark. "There 's canning that really ought to be gotten out of the way, though," she added unwillingly.

Anne rose energetically, and began piling the breakfast dishes.

"Heigh-ho, in about a week I 'll be back at work," she said. "Please move, Mildred. I regret to announce that you are in my way. Take your check to the cashier, lady. This table is taken."

"Oh, keep still, Anne. How can you talk such nonsense in the same breath that you say you 're going to leave us. Don't you feel bad to go?"

"Me heart is broken," Anne cried, and struck an attitude with the crumb tray in one hand and a napkin in the other.

Mildred pushed back her chair with a bang.

"You said you had almost resigned from that old college," she exclaimed crossly.

"Did I say that? How inaccurate of me. You see one really cannot 'almost resign.' It might be done, casually speaking, but from a technical standpoint—"

"Anne, for goodness' sake what are you haranguing about?" Myrtle called from the kitchen.

"I 'm merely explaining to my little sister how in academic circles one may be almost, but not quite, withdrawn, gone, annihilated, what shall I say, non-existent —and still return miraculously restored to the worship

of culture. My gracious, Mildred, there 's a strange man at the side door. Do you suppose he heard all this?'' Anne flew to her work, and Mildred to the door. Anne listened as she worked, and she heard Mildred say:

''Why, I really don't know, I 'll call her.''

When Anne was called she was just giving her kitchen apron a toss and her hair a final poke. Mildred's eyes were big with excitement.

''Anne, there 's an awfully good-looking man out here and he says do we take boarders?'' she whispered. ''He 's been directed to Mrs. Spaulding's, and he came here by mistake, I guess.''

''Well, tell him so.'' Anne's tone was vexed. ''Of course we don't take boarders, you silly girl.''

And just then there strode into the dining-room a tall familiar form, and Bynner Merrick took both of Anne's hands in his, without one glance at Mildred, who stood rooted to the spot.

''What are you doing here?'' gasped Anne, trying to appear as unconcerned as if young men stepped into her dining-room every day and held her hands in the presence of her family.

''What am I doing? Well, I like that. Is this all the welcome I get after cutting loose from the rest of the fellows and sacrificing a brand-new tire on your dinky old country roads?''

''Well, you know we 're glad to see you,'' Anne managed weakly. She freed her hands, though she could not escape the look in his eyes as he bent toward her. Mildred had slipped into the kitchen, but Anne felt that the girls were aware of what was passing in the dining-room.

''Won't you sit down and have some breakfast?''

Anne smiled at him a little uncertainly, but her tone was quite calm again.

His eyes swept the table.

"Those popovers look jolly," he said boyishly. "I 've had my breakfast, though."

"I 'm afraid they 're too cold to be good." Anne looked at them with regret. "But there 's fruit and cereal and coffee, and I 'll have some more bread in just a minute."

"Don't want anything but these," he declared, sitting down and making himself quite at home. "Anne, you little sly-boots, why did you run away before I got back to bid you good-by?"

"Why should I have waited?" Anne asked, surprised, and was sorry the moment she had put the question.

"Well, that 's what I 've come here to tell you," he said, laughing, but the look which he gave her made her vaguely uneasy. She did not answer him, but she took up a coffee-cup and went out to the kitchen where she found Mildred wildly excited and Myrtle trying not to show her curiosity.

"What a funny time to come. Where did he come from? How long will he stay?" Mildred began before Anne had fairly reached the table where the girls were stacking dishes.

"Hush. He 's broken away from a trip some of the boys in his crowd have been on. He won't stay very long. Come in and be introduced, both of you. I want some coffee if there 's any hot. He 's eating those awful, cold popovers."

"We 'll make him some more," cried Myrtle, instantly. "Go back and entertain him, Anne. I 'll stir them up in two minutes."

"All right." Anne's tone was indifferent. She turned at the door. "You people come in," she said.

"You bet Myrtle will be in," muttered Mildred, slamming down a muffin pan. "Keep your eye on him, Anne."

Anne's color was high as she set the coffee-cup down beside her unexpected guest. He turned and caught her hand.

"Are you glad to see me, Anne?" he teased.

"Yes, of course. Please don't, Bynner. I can't think why you ask. We are always glad to see our friends here, although they don't always come at eight A. M.," she finished, smiling.

"Now, Anne, that 's hard on a fellow. This was my one chance to slip off. We separated at seven this morning, down by the Lower Falls, and some of the boys went on to the city for the day. I took the runabout and raced up here. The family expect us to-morrow night, and we 've nearly a hundred and fifty miles to go."

"Have you had a good time?" Anne drew a chair up opposite him, and leaned her chin on her clasped hands. She was surprised at her own pleasure in seeing him.

He gave her a quick look across the table.

"Pretty fair," he said. "These mountain camping trips are n't what they 're cracked up to be. I missed you and Genevieve like the dickens."

"Bynner, you know you say that to every girl you meet."

"About you and Genevieve? You bet I don't. It would n't be polite."

He pushed his coffee-cup away and leaned nearer.

"Anne, don't you see or won't you?"

Anne laughed a little too whole-heartedly to please him, for he frowned and rose to his feet.

"Bynner, I could n't help it," pleaded Anne. "The breakfast table is such a funny place to be so—"

"So much in earnest?" he broke in hotly. "I thought you knew this was n't a billiard-room flirtation."

Anne warned him with her eyes, before she said sweetly,

"Bynner, this is my sister, Myrtle. Myrtle, I think you 've never met Genevieve's brother, have you?"

Myrtle's eyes danced.

"Yes, I have, but he would n't remember me. I was only a first-year girl then, and did n't know anybody. It was at a dance at The Heights," she went on, turning to Anne. "Mr. Merrick was a guest of Alicia Norcross, the plaster girl."

"The plaster girl?" echoed Anne.

"Oh, we always describe the girls by the way they got their money," Myrtle explained carelessly, while Bynner shouted with mirth.

"You should have been the sister-Anne girl then." Mildred's eyes as she entered were wickedly conscious of her remark. The introduction bridged Anne's reproving silence and Myrtle's haughty shrug.

"What have you eaten? Is it too late to give you some fresh popovers?" Myrtle asked, recovering herself. "They must be about done."

"I have n't eaten anything. I 've been looking at Anne," asserted Bynner, with brazen impudence. "But I 'll eat anything you 've been good enough to bother with. I did n't intend to make a bit of trouble. To tell the truth we did n't have much before we left."

"I 'll get them," cried Mildred, obligingly, and Anne

went too, thinking to add a little to the nearly depleted breakfast table.

"He 's a peach," Mildred whispered ecstatically. "Imagine his asking me if we took boarders!"

Anne laughed, and sorted some fruit.

"Are n't you crazy about him, Anne? You never said he was in love with you. No wonder you sent poor Edward off."

"Mildred, there are things that you should know better than to discuss at your age." Anne spoke with such unusual intensity that the younger girl stared.

"Why, I did n't mean any harm, Anne," she said slowly.

Her meekness filled Anne with contrition, and she stooped to kiss the round cheek before she left the pantry. "Just put a bridle on your tongue, dear," she whispered, "and don't mortify Myrtle, either. Family business is n't displayed in public, and poor Myrtle is n't pleased that she has had to be dependent on me."

For a wonder Mildred was silent, but she gave Anne a quick hug before the latter was quite out of her reach.

"Pears and peaches and popovers," Anne cried gaily at the dining-room door. "How likest thou my alliterative breakfast?"

"We don't know what your word means, but we like the breakfast," Myrtle answered. "I 've decided to eat, too." She held up a candied violet as she spoke.

"Come in Anne and claim your possessions." Bynner turned to Anne quickly. "She asked me what I had, so we opened it up."

Anne could easily imagine the charming naïveté with which Myrtle would ask him "what he had."

"My, how luxurious I feel, lounging and eating candy at eight-thirty in the morning," Anne laughed, as she held the tongs suspended over the huge box while she looked for her favorite flavor.

"Where 's mother?" asked Myrtle, suddenly.

"Up-stairs, I think," Mildred answered, coming in at that minute. "Oh, whee! Anne, what luscious candy!"

"Have some?" Anne held out the box and threw a mischievous glance at Bynner. "Mr. Merrick always brings his refreshments with him."

"Not so. This is my fourth popover," replied that youth cheerfully. And Anne reflected that for one apparently in love his appetite was remarkable.

"What plans shall I upset to-day?" he asked after a minute in which he had been under closer observation than he was aware of. Myrtle started and flushed. Anne was quite unconcerned.

"It depends on what you want to do," she said.

"Well, I want to take you off in the car, and I don't want the family to expect you till sundown. We 'll have dinner at Tuckerton's down the old Mayo Road, and you can forget for about six hours that you 've worked so hard all summer."

"Hurrah!" cried Mildred, and rewarded him with a look of undisguised approval.

"How nice!" added Myrtle, not quite as boisterously.

Anne hesitated. There seemed no real reason why she should not go, unless it was that she desired to postpone what she would undoubtedly hear some time. And there stirred in her a little adventurous spirit which insisted that she take the holiday and leave all care behind.

"Look at that corking racer," was Mildred's breath-

less commment as she drew Myrtle to the window to see the car while Anne introduced her mother.

"It 's certainly good-looking," Myrtle agreed primly. "Do you suppose Anne will go?" she wondered aloud when the two girls were in the kitchen out of ear-shot.

"Why should n't she go?" demanded Mildred, aggressively. "She 's worked all summer and hardly had a holiday."

"Oh, I want her to go," Myrtle put in hurriedly.

"And she 's talking about going back to Maryland." Mildred had almost forgotten her fresh grievance in the recent excitement.

Myrtle put down a dish and stared.

"She is?" she said slowly.

"Yes, seems to think she has to. I don't see why, when she hoped to stay at home this year."

"I hope I 'm not the cause." Myrtle's tone was grave. "I 'll do all I can to urge her to stay at home."

Just then Anne appeared in the doorway. She was flushed by her hurried preparations, and she wore the becoming suit that Myrtle had coveted.

"How nice you look!" Mildred exclaimed, waving a tea towel at her in triumph.

"Thank you. Mother thinks it would be nice to go, and so I 'm off. Be good children, and I 'll make it all up to you to-morrow. Don't try to preserve any fruit to-day."

"All right," assented Mildred, with suspicious docility. Her eyes were bright with some untold plan. "Have a good time, dear."

"Good-by, Anne," Myrtle called. "I 'm awfully glad you can go, honey."

Mildred eyed her with affection.

"You can be real decent, Myrtle, when you set out. Let 's do a lot of work and surprise Anne when she gets home."

"But let 's watch them off first," and together they ran out into the pretty grass-grown yard where Bynner's white car gleamed in the sun.

"Such a wonderful car," gloated Mildred as she saw Anne safely in. The two in the car laughed, and Bynner sounded his claxon close to the head of an inquiring hen. "Good-by," he called. "Have some supper, please, when we get back. You 've got to feed us both."

The big engine began to purr, the car leaped ahead, and Anne waved gaily to them as they rounded the curve in the road and the farm-house dropped from view. Bynner stole a quick glance at the girl at his side; then he devoted himself to the wheel for the distance of a mile or so.

"This is the most unexpected good time I ever had," Anne said almost guiltily.

"It 's too good to be true that I have you with me," he answered, without turning to her. She studied his face as she got a side view of it, tanned by exposure to the sun and wind, his eyes twinkling behind his eye-glasses, which stayed on miraculously despite speed or wind, his straight aristocratic nose with its sensitive nostrils, his fine mouth and firm chin, and looking at him she thought that it would be easy for a woman to love him. But not for one minute did Anne try to persuade herself that she was that woman. Only some kind of evil fate had sent him to the farm at a time when Anne was more willing to listen than she had ever been in all her busy life. Never had she felt so alone, and never had the coming year of teaching loomed so threateningly ahead.

"What are you thinking of, Anita?" he asked her once as he turned and smiled at her.

"Of how queer it is that you and I should be here and of how surprised Genevieve would be."

"Oh, no, she would n't be surprised," Bynner corrected her. "She would n't be nearly as surprised as you are." His tone was significant, but Anne passed it by.

"I only left her yesterday," she said. "The children are going down to the beach with Martha."

"Bless their noisy little hearts. They 've nearly worn you out this summer."

"Indeed they have n't," Anne defended with warmth. "I have n't half repaid all that I 've had done for me." She regretted the words the minute that they were out. Bynner smiled.

"Now is your chance to square the account," he said. "But I 'll tell you how a little later."

"Genevieve is going to the Harrisons' house-party," Anne told him placidly.

"Genevieve 's a gay young sister. She 's got to make up for those four years at college, when the rest of the crowd was having a good time."

"I 'm glad she went. I should never have met her any other way."

"Yes, I 'm glad you met her, too," he assented comically. "Is this too fast for you, Anne? I remember you used to drive the kids around in that little Saxon at about two miles an hour."

"This seems a little fast," Anne told him breathlessly, her eyes shining, her pink veil floating straight out behind.

"Like it?" he persisted.

"Yes." She nodded as if ashamed.

"Ha, I knew you did," he crowed over her. "You 've been proper for so long you can't quite get back to normal again without a struggle."

"That is a decidedly left-handed compliment, sir."

"I don't generally pay any at all."

"Nonsense, you are noted for them. Genevieve says—" Anne paused. Bynner had made conversation rather unnaturally hard to-day. She could not forget the little scene at the breakfast table.

"That is—?" he questioned.

"Changed my mind," announced Anne, briefly.

"Feeling pretty prim to-day, are n't you?" he taunted.

"I do feel a trifle subdued," she acknowledged.

"Not really subdued, just dashed for a minute at the suddenness of riding out into the West with a Lochinvar who comes to breakfast and eats four popovers."

"Be careful, Bynner. Somebody else may want to use this road again some time."

"I can't believe it possible," he muttered as he just swung clear of a gully, while Anne clung to the side of the car in genuine alarm.

"We have to come back this way."

"We 're never coming back. I have that all arranged. I 've been cheated out of you all summer, and I 'm to have my innings now."

"How very nice," she said in a slightly amused voice, but it trembled a little as she added: "Here comes a friend of mine. Don't run him down."

Up the hill to meet Bynner's luxurious great car was

chugging a small dusty runabout, and at the wheel was Edward Sewall. He did not seem to recognize Anne at first. But just as she felt her welcoming smile beginning to grow unnaturally frozen, he bowed and then waved. In another second he was gone.

CHAPTER VI

"DOCTOR?" inquired Bynner, casually. "Or is n't that his car?"

"Yes, he 's a doctor."

"Anne, I get insanely jealous of all your friends, do you know it?" he said suddenly. He was driving more slowly now, but he did not look at her.

"That 's not a very sensible thing to do."

"I can't help it. I 've been miserable ever since I left you, wondering what you were doing those wonderful moonlight nights, and whether that donkey Ashburton had been around any more."

Anne laughed merrily. She was putting deep down out of sight the little cautious warning that her New England conscience had whispered once or twice that morning. She felt happy and care-free and a trifle excited, if the truth be told, with the excitement that comes to a girl when she first realizes that she has stirred a man deeply.

"Mr. Ashburton did n't appear but once before I came away, and then he talked to Genevieve more than to me."

"And this grim-mouthed young doctor? There I have you, Anne. You are concealing something."

"Has Edward a grim mouth? I never noticed before."

"He is hardly what you would call affable, I should say."

"Oh, you quite misjudge him. He is just a boy, and very nice."

"H'm, I admire your taste, Anne. You haven't answered my question yet."

"You haven't asked a question that I can answer. Moreover, Dr. Sewall is a friend of the family, and I think you forget yourself."

Anne flushed a little at her own sharpness, but she stood by her guns bravely when Bynner turned to look at her.

"You are a loyal little soul. Do you stand up for me like that?"

"I have never had to. Look out, Bynner, please, or we shall never get back alive. Please, please watch your wheel."

"Really?" he teased her, leaning nearer and keeping both eyes on her face.

Anne frowned past him at the speedometer.

"You trouble me," she said quietly.

He turned his head away instantly, and fixed his eyes on the road. "Does that suit? I 'm sorry, Anne. It 's great fun to bother you, though."

"Bynner, have you any idea where you are going?"

"Certainly. Tuckerton's and then the prettiest way home."

"Did you really mean to take me there?"

"Yes, don't you want to go?"

"Why, yes." Anne hesitated. "I 'm awfully inexperienced, Bynner," she added frankly, "but I have heard somebody say that Tuckerton's is n't as nice as it used to be."

"Nonsense. We 've been over in crowds lots of times.

I have n't been this summer, but if old Tuck is about he 'll not have forgotten me, I 'll wager.''

''And it 's a perfectly all-right place?'' Anne was still a little troubled.

''I should say yes, and great feeds. Come on, Anne. Be a sport. I said I was going there when we started.''

''Yes, but I thought you were just talking,'' she protested. ''Besides, it 's frightfully expensive there, and I don't want you to spend money on me, Bynner.''

''These New England maids,'' he groaned. ''It 's not my Chicago girl who ever protests at the money I spend.''

''Nor the one in Tampico?'' Anne asked him slyly.

He turned toward her.

''So that way the land lies, hey? Dismiss her, Anne, dismiss her. I am not engaged to her and never shall be.''

''These many affairs!'' murmured Anne.

Again he turned to her. He was driving more slowly, and his eyes were often on Anne's face.

''Do you care?'' he asked her.

''For you and your love-making?'' she flouted.

''Why don't you ever believe me?'' His tone was serious, but she was sure that his eyes were smiling.

''Because, Bynner, you don't. really expect to be believed, you know.''

''But somebody will accept me some day,'' he announced in a tone far more lugubrious than the anticipation would seem to warrant.

''Yes, Mr. Merrick, and then we shall all congratulate you heartily.''

''When do you go back to teaching?'' he asked abruptly.

She gave an involuntary shiver.

"In two weeks."

"Glad, I suppose?" His tone was suspiciously careless.

Anne was instantly on guard.

"I 'm delighted. I love it."

"You seem just cut out for it," he contributed a little maliciously.

"Yes, I think I am," Anne answered, but her eyes flashed. "I shall go abroad next summer, if all goes well. I expect to go to Oxford and take another degree, and wear spectacles and stiff collars and flat-heeled shoes."

"Splendid. My wife and I will look you up when we are in London if we have time."

"Thank you, but you probably won't be thinking of Oxford. To a mere layman, you know, a university could hardly prove as attractive—"

"Anne, I shall kiss you sure as shooting if you pucker your mouth like that a minute longer."

"A little more attention judiciously expended on the road might save my life-insurance company and yours quite a little money."

"I know what I 'm about lots better than you do, young lady. You 've never been to Tuckerton's in all your short life of report cards and freshman themes."

"Is this the entrance?" Anne asked as they swung into a broad avenue between rows of quiet pines.

"This is the place. It's a mighty pretty spot. But I 'm glad now I did n't telephone ahead for an engagement luncheon."

"Is n't it a pity I could n't have the luncheon without being engaged?" Anne suggested wickedly.

"Why could n't we be engaged just during the meal?" he asked her, with such a disarming grin that she forgot to be cautious. There was nothing sentimental about his question.

"Very well," she assented after a judicial pause. "Can we eat in an hour? I never like to be engaged longer than an hour at one time."

"It is a little trying," he acknowledged, and swung the car in at a huge gateway flanked by two stone pillars supporting an arch.

"And this is Tuckerton's," remarked Anne, curiously.

"Yes. See that you behave circumspectly. We don't want our names in the papers." He drew up in front of a broad half-open door which led into a low-roofed rustic house where a white-covered table gleamed here and there from between high partitions of polished oak.

Anne exclaimed with delight as she looked in.

"How quaint and cozy. I love the little separate places where you can be all by yourself."

"Yes, Tuckerton's is very popular," Bynner said dryly. "Don't let 's get out yet. I want to show you the sunken gardens. They are just in back."

He turned as he spoke and gave a surprised whistle.

"Hello, here 's the medical Ford. Does your friend also lunch here to-day?"

"Why, it is Edward," Anne cried in surprise as she recognized the driver of the little car just swinging into the yard. Edward drew up in front of the entrance and addressed Anne pleasantly.

"Are you people out of gasolene, too? I take it that 's the only reason you would be here."

"Why, no, we came to lunch," answered Anne. Then

she looked at Bynner. "This is Mr. Merrick, Genevieve's brother, Dr. Sewall," she said.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Merrick." Edward's tone was business-like. "But I 'm sorry to meet you here. We don't take dinner here at Tuckerton's any more," he added. And then to the man who appeared at the door of a garage not far from the entrance, "We only want gasolene."

"I don't want any gasolene, and I don't intend to get any even to oblige your medical friend," Bynner said to Anne, purposely ignoring the look of inquiry which the garage man was sending their way while he waited for Edward to back his car up to the tank.

"The man is looking at you," said Anne, uncomfortably. She was quite shaken out of her former mood of happy abandon.

"Let him look." And then in a louder tone, "Is n't this Tuckerton's Inn?"

The man's assent was further emphasized by a second seedy-looking person who came and lounged in the doorway of the garage.

"This is the place," he echoed.

"But not under Tuckerton's management any more," put in Edward, quickly.

"Where is old Tuck?" Bynner still addressed the man. He seemed to delight in ignoring Edward.

The loafer removed his unlighted cigarette from a cavernous mouth.

"Old Tuck, he went to Long Island last year, to a swell joint. We got a new man, Hen Swansey, but we can take care of you just as good."

"Thank you. I guess I won't stay. I just wanted to see Tuck anyway." Bynner started his car so quickly

that in the turn he nearly annihilated Edward, who had not been prepared for such a quick departure.

"Well, we 'll try another place," Bynner spoke with face comically screwed up as he wafted a last glance at the stone arch. His indifference might have taken in everything about the yard, including Edward.

"Go a little slowly, please." Anne put her hand on his arm. "I think Dr. Sewall is coming along, too."

"But I 'm not taking the doctor to dinner, Anita."

"No, but I want to thank him. Think what we might have gotten into." She shivered.

"Now what in the dickens do you suppose you *would* have gotten into?" For the first time his tone was exasperated. "Poor service, the chance to drink while we ate, if we cared about it, but we did n't—I really can't see where the narrow escape comes in."

At that moment Anne was turning, as if oblivious to Bynner's impatience, trying to see how close Edward was to their car. He waved at her and speeded up.

"Don't mind my speaking like that,"—his remark seemed addressed to both of them as he came abreast of them in the road. "That place was raided last week, and as I 'm one of the men who instigated the raid, I felt bound to interfere."

He seemed to consider this a good parting shot, for he hardly waited for an answer, but passed Bynner with a nonchalance to be envied and disappeared down a cross-road, wisely refusing to be left in the dust of the big white car.

Anne had a shrewd notion that he had had the best of the conversation, but she refrained from making any more comments to Bynner. She had been keenly aware of the tone in which he had last addressed her, and she

felt curious to know when he would assume again the courtesy which she had never before missed in him. She was troubled, too, by the fact that Tuckerton's was actually bad enough to be under the displeasure of the law. He seemed to read her thoughts.

"Lots of places are raided, Anne," he said soothingly. Then with a laugh he became himself again. "Well, that 's a nice pickle to get into with a girl you are trying to make a good impression on." He smiled down at her, but his eyes behind his eye-glasses were anxious. He was asking her forgiveness.

"We won't discuss it any more," she said, her tone politely pleasant.

"I 'm sorry I was such a beast about your friend," he pleaded, trying to make her smile at him. "I 'm all eaten up with jealousy while you 're calmly planning your dinner order."

She smiled despite herself. Yet she knew that if she were to marry him it would always be this way. And it would not be so easy to forgive after a while. He would be quick with his censure, equally eager to be forgiven and to have things as they were before, and Anne knew that she demanded of a man more than Bynner had the capacity to give. How had Edward met them when he was going in the other direction? And how had he guessed where they had been bound for? It was a mystery that she busied herself with while her companion put his attention on the road, stealing now and then an anxious glance at her apparently serene profile.

When Bynner spoke next it was with gentle deference. "There are two hotels about four miles down and a motor inn just a mile away. I think they are all right," he added with humility.

A sudden impulse made Anne lay her hand on his knee.

"Of course they are, Bynner. We won't either of us allow our holiday to be spoiled. I 'm hungrier than ever, and I 'll go to the first place you like."

He flashed one of his brilliant smiles at her.

"You are all right, Anne."

"And I want chicken and waffles," she said demurely. She tried to stifle a little heavy feeling that was growing heavier as she thought of Edward's surprised look when he first saw them.

"That sounds good to me, too. And some cold—some cold—now what shall go with it?"

"Oh, anything." She laughed inconsequently. Why should she let Edward and his opinions trouble her when she was forever free from him.

"We had fish last night," Bynner was telling her. "Caught them and cooked them over the camp-fire. Washed the dishes in the water from the radiator. But this morning we didn't catch any fish, so we had Peter's chocolate and peanuts. Very nourishing, but I was glad to see those popovers."

"Tell me about your camping trip." Anne, with the wisdom of the serpent, pushed the burden of conversation on him.

"I will while we eat. Here we are," and he drew up with a daring curve in front of a hotel where Anne remembered having dinner once with Edward.

"Why should I care?" she asked herself as she followed a trim maid to the sitting-room. She could almost hear Lucille's scornful comment on the "reminiscently sentimental" ones who go about talking mournfully of the "last time."

"I don't believe Lucille Bernays was good for me," she said suddenly, speaking her thoughts aloud.

Bynner looked puzzled.

"Oh, the sister of that queer old professor who goes around the country making geological surveys?"

"Not a very good description of her adored brother." Anne smiled.

"Did you like him?" Bynner asked instantly.

"Very much." Anne began to feel a childish delight in teasing him. "But I was talking about his sister."

"Never mind either of them. You 've got me for just one day."

"How thrilling!" She laughed at him over her glass.

"Anne, I want you to listen to something."

"Why do you always spring a *coup d'état* at meal time?" she parried.

And then she watched him settle back sulkily while the waitress brought their order.

It was a delicious mystery to her still, this hold which she seemed to have over Genevieve's gay and worldly brother. And it was part of the riddle of her nature that she could enjoy the somewhat dangerous game which he every now and then began, and still in some hidden corner of her heart feel the little hurt place which ached unmistakably when she allowed herself to think of Edward.

But near the close of their day, when the familiar hills of home appeared again, and far off a little star twinkled over Heart-Break Hill, Bynner became unmistakably serious, and then at last Anne's common sense flew a warning signal.

The gay little spirit of adventure no longer urged her as in the morning, for suddenly it seemed a mean and

cowardly thing to forget pain at the expense of some one else. She tried to excuse herself, for she knew that no girl is supposed to be convinced of a man's affection until he tells her of it, but Anne had not lived in a world where matrimony, like tennis, was a game of skill, and she felt that the standard to which she had tried to hold Edward and which he had failed to reach, should be equally true for herself. So she broke ruthlessly into Bynner's hot and eager words, the indifference in her voice belied by her pounding, reproachful heart.

"I don't care for you at all, Bynner—not at all," she insisted, her desire to make things right at last, leading her into unconscious cruelty.

It was then that he turned to her in the dusk and cried out in a voice unlike his own:

"Don't go on. I think I understand. Only if that's the case, I—I—well, I can't see why you bothered with me."

Anne felt the shamed tears in her eyes.

"You were only treating me as you do the rest." It was her passionate attempt to acquit herself.

He tried to laugh with his old glad response, but the attempt was worse than silence.

"Oh, I know it 's all my fault. You have n't done a thing, Anita."

He turned on his lights then, and his preoccupation freed her from an answer, but when the little spray light over the speedometer flashed a betraying finger across his mouth and chin he leaned forward and turned it off. Even in the pity which Anne felt for him, she found room for an instantaneous reflection that Bynner's dramatic little gesture would make good material in the story she should one day write.

"Home is just around the bend," she told him cheerfully.

"So soon?" he copied her tone. "This is some hill, but we have eaten it up pretty fast." As they swerved into the broad yard he bent nearer to her. "Don't think of this last. I 've had a good day, Anne."

She smiled at him in the darkness a little tremulously, but her reply was never made. The side door opened, and Myrtle's voice, sweet and gay in the still evening, floated out to them.

"We saw your lights way down in the valley. Edward is here, and we are all ready for supper."

"Edward again," muttered Bynner, and for a moment, despite her half-guilty gladness, Anne could not blame him. Her next thought was less welcome. If Edward cared at all for her he could not come after the experiences of the morning and the rebuff of the night before. A jealous question insistently intruded. Was his infatuation for Myrtle so great that he could not stay away even till Anne was gone?

"Come in, come in," Mildred cried impatiently, and Anne roused from her momentary absent-mindedness.

"It was just a minute's think, as Myrtle used to say," she apologized gaily.

But Bynner had been watching her closely. "You do care for me, or for some one," he muttered as they went in.

CHAPTER VII

ANNE took off her hat soberly and brushed back her hair by the uncertain light of the kerosene lamp that flickered under the looking-glass in the side hall. She felt, through all the turbulent unhappiness that she was trying to hide, a definite sense of comfort in the fact that she was pretty. She did not realize the incoherence of the thought at the time, but for a moment there came to her a pleasant sense of the brightness of some unknown future years, when fortune should have changed her into a different Anne. Anne had experienced this mysterious uplift before. It came to her at moments of greatest discouragement, stayed with her for the space of a quick drawn breath, and left her—convinced. She could neither trace nor explain it. Yet there was with her at this moment, unconfessed, the knowledge that she had in her some possibility which would change the world for her. After this fleeting thought she smiled a little shamefacedly at her reflection in the glass and became sister Anne once more. She heard her mother say, "Where is Anne all this time?" and she turned from the mirror and walked down the corridor toward the dining-room.

Mildred waved her away.

"Go off, Anne. You 're company to-night."

As she turned laughing she faced her mother, who had pushed her way into the hall from the unlighted

sitting-room and now stood blinking at Anne a little confusedly, a white knitted shawl drawn about her thin shoulders.

"Did you have a good time?" she whispered eagerly.

Anne nodded, laying a light hand on her mother's shoulder as if to guide her back to the sitting-room.

Mrs. Carew gazed back at her daugher, unwilling to be put off.

"Where 'd you go?"

"We went to Hammerton and then up the mountain road. The foliage was wonderful."

Her mother pursed up her lips. She never discussed foliage and she knew that Anne knew it. But they were over the threshold now, and Edward was rising to meet them, his face unusually grave in the firelight, while Bynner made gallant arrangements for their comfort.

If Anne had expected Edward to suffer by contrast with a man like Bynner Merrick, she was soon to find herself mistaken. Edward had never seemed so well poised, so dignified, and Bynner had never appeared so superficial. He laughed a great deal, said a number of futile things which would have delighted Myrtle, but found no response in Anne, and took Mrs. Carew out to supper on his arm in the most approved English manner. During the meal Anne was struck afresh by Myrtle's vivid beauty. She would not have blamed Bynner for paying court to it, but she noticed that although he laughed much and talked almost incessantly, yet his eyes never lingered anywhere. He did not meet Anne's gaze even when she spoke to him directly. All at once his flippancy seemed touched with pathos. He was determined to make merry regardless of what had happened that afternoon, and Anne felt a sudden respect for the pride

that bade him play the fool. As they left the table Anne could not fail to see the gentleness with which Edward helped Mrs. Carew.

"You are very good to mother," she said to him at the sitting-room door, where she had paused a moment.

He was plainly embarrassed by her remark.

"I am glad to help her," he said a little stiffly.

"I know I am leaving her in good hands." Anne's voice was pitched too low for the rest to hear.

"I shall do my best. I am hoping to operate in another month. One of her eyes you need not worry about at all."

"I am so glad we have you to depend on."

"So you are really going back?"

"Yes, oh, yes. I—I—" she turned her head away. There was a look in his eyes that she had waited for the night before and had not seen.

He pulled her gently into the corridor.

"Come out here a moment. They won't miss us. Unless Mr. Merrick is waiting for you," he added significantly.

"I don't want to come out, Edward. I—I—can't talk to you," Anne's voice fluttered as she drew back.

"Come and show me the chair in the den which Myrtle said I was to fix," he said quite naturally.

"I don't want to." Anne spoke like a little girl, and like a little girl she obeyed him even while she objected.

"It 's mother's old arm-chair," she explained after a minute.

"Is it really?" he questioned, growing bolder as he watched her face. "And is Mr. Merrick the man you have been visiting this summer?"

"Edward!"

"You know what I mean? Are those the youngsters you have taken care of?"

"They were his sisters and brothers. Mr. Merrick is not married yet," Anne replied wickedly.

"No; he is n't, but he will be some time."

"Well, don't be vicious about it, Edward."

"What did he want to take you to Tuckerton's for?" he demanded.

Anne drew herself up.

"You need not refer again to that. He told you the place was always all right before."

"Well, it is n't all right now," he answered unreasonably. "And it was never a good enough place for you, Anne. You know yourself it always had a black eye."

"Oh, Bynner is n't priggish about what he does." Anne's tone was provokingly reckless. If he had brought her here to talk of this, she would soon put an end to the interview.

"You don't like any interference,"—his voice was firm,—"but you must remember that one man can size up another pretty well, and that I 've known you and Myrtle for a long time. I might have a right, I think—"

"Edward, you are the most exasperating man I ever met." Anne had never come so near stamping. To think of Edward's showing her one day how little he cared and then dictating to her within twenty-four hours.

"And besides, I think my feeling for you warrants my telling you, no matter how you feel toward me in return."

She opened her eyes at him.

"Your feeling for me? I thought we decided last night that you did n't have any."

"You were the one who decided it."

"Edward, you have seemed like a stranger ever since I came back. You called me selfish and held up Myrtle as an example."

"Anne!" His tone was incredulous.

"And you told me I threw aside everything for my work."

"Yes, I think you do. That is why I asked you again if you were going back this year. Your mother needs you."

"She has Myrtle. What do you think we live on, Edward?" Anne's tone was desperate.

He hesitated.

"But you were going to travel."

"It was just to fit myself for a better position."

"That 's why I said you were all for your work."

"Oh, Edward. I can't explain." Anne twisted her handkerchief until it was only a little ball in her nervous fingers.

"And you are going away now and leave your mother and all of us? She is n't the only one who wants you to give it up."

Anne was stung beyond all control.

"Somebody in this family has to work," she said in a tense, quiet voice. "I have helped for six years, and this year I was free to do as I liked. Myrtle was ready at last to earn money." She paused, overwhelmed at the pitfall into which her own speech was leading her. "Even an old friend has no right to dictate," she finished coldly.

"What changed your mind after you had decided to

stop teaching?" he persisted, apparently indifferent to her anger.

She was silent.

"Anne, do you realize that you wrote me only last week that this year would find you free?"

"Why do we go all over what we discussed last night?"

"You are keeping something from me."

"Why should n't I?" she flashed.

He was imperturbable.

"Is it because Myrtle does not want to work?"

"Edward!" she cried out desperately.

"Something is taking you away from us."

"You did n't care last night." Her voice was beginning to tremble.

"I could n't talk to you. You were just home from this fine place where you had been having such a gay summer. Don't think Myrtle has not told me about you and Mr. Merrick before. Last night you talked as if we did n't matter back here at home. Then you spoke of traveling, and I supposed, of course, that you could n't bear the thought of settling down here away from your work and all your friends. And your letters were so full of good times that I knew Bantam Hill would never appeal to you again."

It was with a bitter little smile that Anne recalled her efforts to make the letters sound as lively and interesting as possible.

"I know that you are keeping something from me," he repeated with dogged determination.

"We can seldom be quite frank, Edward."

"You can with me."

Anne longed to take him at his word and ask him one

direct question, "Are you in love with Myrtle?" Instead she bent over the dilapidated old chair and tucked in a piece of the upholstery lining.

"We are wasting time, Edward."

"He 's coming. I can't keep him back any longer," Mildred suddenly announced from the doorway.

Anne turned, mystified.

"Bynner Merrick is bound to find you. I had n't planned to let you be disturbed so soon." Mildred was disarmingly ingenuous.

Anne looked at Edward, a wave of pink suffusing her face. Had he arranged this meeting?

"Say, I don't like to interrupt," came Bynner's injured voice, "but I have to go back in about half an hour."

"Oh, Bynner, I did n't think I had been out but a minute." She knew that underneath his laughter he was hurt.

Edward made a welcome interruption by pulling Mildred's favorite curl, but his eyes traveled from Anne to Bynner Merrick and back again before he threw Mildred a challenge to beat her to the sitting-room door.

When they were gathered again about the fire, Anne grew gentle with Bynner despite Edward's grave glance directed now and then at them, as if to seek for what he feared to find.

Myrtle had not joined them when Bynner related his funniest camp story, but she made a pretty whirlwind entrance at the door and demanded to know the joke. Then Edward jumped up quickly from his seat beside Anne and insisted on Myrtle's sitting down and deprived her of her kitchen apron in such a playful, half-tender manner that Anne looked consciously away and laughed

more heartily than ever at Bynner's nonsense. "You are not the only one who can act the fool," she wanted to say as she met his eyes, expressionless beneath their shallow laughter.

At nine he said that he must be on the way to meet his friends as he had already outstayed his time, and only Mrs. Carew made any real effort to keep him. Mildred, who had been unusually silent, did suggest that they go out and see him off, and Myrtle asked him prettily to come again when he did not steal Anne for a whole day. Anne herself was relieved that she was not to see him alone again, and she lingered a little behind the rest as he went out to see about his car. While the others gathered idly around it, he must have missed her, for he came back suddenly and found her standing in the little dimly lighted entry that opened on the porch. All his gaiety dropped from him.

"Anne," he said huskily, "Anne, I don't know how I can go and leave you like this. I don't blame you for not caring, dear. Only—"

Anne stood perfectly still, her eyes upon the ground. She did not trust her voice.

"Well, Sewall is a lucky fellow, that 's all."

But as he was about to turn away she laid a hand upon his arm.

"I 'm so sorry, Bynner," she said, and her own emotion made her voice perilously sweet. "Please don't mind about this. I 'm not worth it. And—and—" she did not heed the warning which bade her be still, "And —you are wrong about Edward Sewall."

Perhaps what happened was Anne's fault. She tried to excuse first him and then herself. But at the moment she could not have told how it all happened. She

only knew that suddenly Bynner was holding her close, her cheek against his rough great-coat, his lips upon her hair. And then Edward's voice spoke almost beside them.

"Pardon me, but Myrtle is cold and would like her coat."

In all her shame and anger Anne was aware that Bynner had been very gentle with her and that he was quite master of himself when he turned to Edward. He did not even start away from her, but he seemed to protect her as he turned to the speaker.

"I am going now. I 'm sorry I kept you people waiting. I 've been saying good-by to Anne."

Edward might have been cutting, sarcastic, indignant, reproachful, dramatic, but he was none of these. Anne did not see the look in his eyes, instantly veiled behind a curtain of indifference, but she was amazed at his tone, and she shrank back as if she had been struck. He was quite genial.

"That 's all right. Excuse me if I just go through here?"

Bynner turned again to Anne, but she put out both hands, as if to ward him off.

"Oh, no, no," she said, and turned from him with quivering lips. From her room up-stairs where she crouched by the bed, still trembling with the excitement of Bynner's recklessness, she heard him call good-by, and then somebody blew the horn insistently to the accompaniment of Myrtle's laugh. His engine whirred a moment, some one said a last gay good night, and then there flashed into Anne's room for a second the blinding dazzle of headlights. After that came darkness again, the sound of closing doors, and Mildred calling, "Anne."

Anne buried her face in the white spread and would not answer. She felt shamed, belittled, and yet half guilty. She realized vaguely that she was somehow to blame and that Bynner had forgotten himself because she had not helped him to remember. How strange it had been, that close strong clasp, the touch of his lips, tender even under the passion that had mastered him. She knew then that she did not love him, for there had been not the slightest response in her, whereas Edward's quiet tone had lashed her by its very indifference.

Once more Mildred called. Anne rose, thinking to lock her door, but she was arrested by a sudden thought. She must act as if nothing unusual had happened, at least for to-night. Later there would be time to think. But to stay up-stairs would arouse the curiosity of everybody and make more trouble than it would avoid. She pressed her cold hands against her burning face and closed her eyes for a moment. Then she stepped to the door.

"Coming," she called just as Mildred put her foot upon the lowest stair.

"We are going to pop corn, and the store down here is most gone. Bring some down from the attic, will you?"

"All right," Anne called, glad of a moment's relief.

As she went slowly up the attic stairs with her little flash-light, she tried to make the events of the last few moments seem real. Bynner did not respect her, Edward did not care for her, she told herself bitterly, yet as she seemed to feel again the sudden impulsive ardor with which Bynner had drawn her to him, she knew that if Edward had treated her that way she would have called it love. He had never tried to master her; else

he might have possessed her by now. She understood at last just how little he cared. Even though she had renounced him the night before, without visible proof, which she had never had, it had been hard to believe that he was really in love with Myrtle, but now there was no shadow of doubt about one thing. To Myrtle he might some day declare himself, but for Anne he had no love. That genial, undisturbed tone in which he spoke to Bynner meant that he would be only too happy to find Anne engaged. "He would never dream it could mean anything else," she thought, ever loyal despite her hurt.

The attic was dark and smelled sweetly of herbs and the faint outbreathings of ancient presses, where now and then a quaint old dress leaned forth a little enviously. Mrs. Carew always kept most carefully the things that had been her mother's and her grandmother's, and the attic was a treasure-house of bygone days. Anne paused now, instead of hurrying on her errand to the farthest corner of the garret, and turned her flash-light curiously upon one curtained corner. How comforting it would be to sit and brood to-night among these fragrant old things and cry a little perhaps and think a good deal, too, so that later, facing her family and all the tangles which would need to be straightened, she could see more clearly what she should do.

Solitude was the most precious and the most impossible thing that Anne could imagine at that moment. She stifled a sigh and turned away to do what she had been bidden. In one corner, near the western window, she found the corn hanging in fat yellow bunches, which crackled as she touched them. She dreaded more than she dared acknowledge to enter again that room where they were waiting for her. She wanted to see things

clearly and see them straight, but there was not time to think. She seemed to have no anger toward Bynner, but the fact had not then begun to trouble her. She even wondered why he could not have come just a little later in her life, when her heart would not have been so sore. Suddenly she began to scourge herself. She had pretended to sacrifice Edward, perhaps for Myrtle, and she had not strength enough to bear the thought that Edward should accept it. She held her head higher now and shut her lips so tightly that they made a determined line in her set face. When it came time she would summon a smile. She would show him how wise had been her rejection of him the night before, by making him demonstrate his lack of love for her. She might even force him to show how he felt toward Myrtle. Then he would say: "You were quite right, Anne. We neither of us cared."

She hummed a careless tune as she sauntered through the lower hall, and the girls met her with reproaches for her slowness. Mrs. Carew sat dozing in her chair, her head tipped a little back, her mouth slightly open. Edward was quite matter-of-fact, and kept obviously busy with the shelling of the corn. Apparently no remark had been made. Over the unromantic, corn-popper, Edward said coldly to Anne:

"Now I know what you were keeping from me."

She took his measure with level eyes, and she thought she read utter indifference. She would have put him off with a jest, but she could not. So, instead, she left him with a riddle.

"What I kept from you then is not the thing I am keeping from you now."

He stared at her. She felt the tears rising, and her

throat grew tight, but she laughed down her emotion and added a little recklessly:

"You need advice on one thing, Edward. I 'll give it to you when you find the right girl."

Mildred came up just then, and Anne was glad, for it left him thinking. At the door it was to Anne, not Myrtle, that he turned last.

"Am I to know that advice?" he asked. She never guessed how shaken he was by the events of the day and evening. His voice was irreproachably polite.

"The advice? Oh, yes. It was—it is—" she faltered. She dared not finish what she had begun.

He bent then for the first time that evening, and looked at her for a moment. This time he spoke to her deliberately, though his voice trembled despite himself.

"Don't flirt, Anne, whatever else you do."

She was stung to sudden anger at his injustice.

"You are the best judge," she flashed, and closed the door.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHAT are we to do about that girl who was caught automobiling with those town men?" The speaker, a sallow, sharp-eyed lady of uncertain years, held her tea-cup poised judicially, and looked toward Anne with pursed-up lips. She wore numerous strings of beads and chains, which clinked as she moved, and her name was Annabelle Dingledine.

Anne gazed back at her with clear untroubled eyes in which a ray of amusement was flickering.

"Please, don't you think as long as this is such a nice social tea, we might perhaps leave the punishment of poor Lenore till some other time?"

"To think of calling any girl Lenore," snapped Fraülein Reicher, frowning at her American sandwich in disgust.

"She was named out of love for our great American poet," Miss Hammerhart said stiffly. Miss Hammerhart's favorite subject was American literature, and she and Fraülein Reicher were frequently at odds.

"And who might he be? I had not heard zat you had a great American poet yet." Fraülein raised her eyebrows, and fixed a severely analytical glance upon the undismayed Miss Hammerhart.

"I mean Edgar Allan Poe," that lady answered with dignity.

"Vell, I should have thought," Fraülein began,

bristling for a fray, "I should have thought, effectively—"

At this last word Anne rushed to the rescue.

"Fraülein, you don't think we should discuss Lenore's punishment now, do you?"

"We are to have a faculty meeting about that very thing in less than two hours," the musical Miss Dingledine said succinctly. Her subject was mathematics, and her favorite expression, "Make every word count." Anne had long since ceased to enjoy the humor of the remark, for Miss Annabelle Dingledine was the one member of the faculty whom she could not make herself like.

"Oh, don't talk about punishment here. You see, I 'm an outsider, and a friend of Lenore's, besides. You don't want to spoil my tea."

It was Lucille Bernays who spoke, a sister of Professor Bernays, the man of whom the college was proudest. He was a scholar and a geologist of repute, whom Schull College had only been able to keep because of the fact that his health was too poor to allow him to follow his desires. He had a modest home off-campus for himself and Lucille, and here the college girls found welcome and good times whenever they liked, for Lucille enjoyed nothing more than holding open house.

"Yes, you and your brozzer encourage the girls to altogezzer too many good times." Fraülein turned to the last speaker, her cudgel not yet laid down.

Anne came to a loyal defense, for Lucille was her best friend.

"It certainly is lovely," she agreed artlessly, "the influence for good that Lucille has over the girls."

"Yes, we see Mees Lenore greatly influenced." Fraü-

lein's sarcasm was always of a sturdy, unmistakable variety.

"Peace, peace," laughed President Thompson, placatingly. "One criticism of us is that we do not leave our work behind us when we play. To change the subject from Miss Lenore—who has seen the plans for the new college? They are in my study."

A polite murmur of enthusiasm went around, and several followed the tall stooping president as he rose to go into the adjoining room.

"Imagine a new college!" Miss Hammerhart turned to Anne, with brightening eyes.

"And proper recitation-rooms with enough black board space!" contributed Miss Dingledine.

"And new pianos!" added Evelyn Gordon, a pretty member of the music faculty.

"And a hockey-field!" cried the rosy-cheeked young gymnasium director.

Anne rose and put down her cup and plate.

"Let 's get out of this," she whispered to Lucille, who nodded and followed Anne out of the door where they shook hands with faded little Mrs. Thompson and then emerged into the crisp November twilight.

"Such a relief," Anne laughed as she lifted her face to the sweet mountain wind, and snuggled her furs more closely about her throat.

"You like it," said Lucille, sturdily.

"Of course I do," agreed Anne at once. "They are interesting and funny and dear and they make me want to write a book and put them all in. But now and then they grow tiresome, you must admit."

"Especially poor old President Thompson, who did n't want to talk about work, so introduced his beloved

plans.'' Lucille laughed aloud and skipped a step to get into Anne's steady swing.

''Where are you bound for with that stern expression, and may I come along?''

''I was just thinking how wonderful it would be if I could write a book.'' Anne's eyes flashed as she spoke. Her voice vibrated with enthusiasm. ''There are reams of good stories in those people we have just left. Why, I was thinking the other night about it when Evelyn came in to play for us. Of course being the youngest and prettiest of the faculty she always antagonizes some of them, Miss Dingledine, for instance.''

''And Evelyn has too much masculine attention to please Fraülein Reicher,'' Lucille added mischievously.

''I know. Well, she was playing some of those sentimental things that she will get tired of in a year or two more, when I began to look around at the people who were listening. I thought they'd be a little bored, but, you should have seen them. Evelyn was just beginning 'Forgotten' when I saw Miss Hammerhart get up and walk over to the window. She was almost crying.''

''Oh, Anne, you are n't trying to defend those melodramatic actresses who pretend they can't listen to a love song without blowing their noses and gazing out of the window? My brother says it 's all nonsense to give people like that sympathy. They need backbone.'' Lucille spoke with energy, fortified by her favorite phrase, ''my brother says.''

''I am defending them,'' Anne disagreed staunchly. ''If you are going to be a story-writer you 've got to see romance everywhere. Your brother is n't in the sentimental stage any more.''

''I 'm glad he 's not.''

"But you didn't let me finish my little story," Anne protested.

"All right. Miss Hammerhart walked to the window, Fraülein Reicher clasped her hands and gulped down a rising sob, and Annabelle Dingledine, with a tintinabulation of jet and chains and crystal beads, sailed grim-mouthed from the room."

Anne laughed despite herself.

"Tragedy does come to everybody," she finished, unconvinced.

"Yes, my dear, but if somebody you were in love with died or married somebody else, should I have to take all my best Victrola records out in the yard and break them up in little pieces?"

"Your brother has spoiled you."

"Wait till something happens to *you*," Lucille said wisely. The fun had gone out of her voice, but fortunately she did not look at Anne's face. In a different tone she added: "Don't you want to go in the post-office, as long as we are passing by? You can't get your last mail if you go home to dinner with me."

The shadow left Anne's face.

"Faculty meeting to-night," she groaned. "I can't have dinner with you."

"Oh, my brother will take you up afterwards, if you aren't scared of him," Lucille suggested wickedly. "He's awfully practical, you know."

"I'll think the proposition over," Anne returned calmly, but her eyes laughed back at Lucille. Lucille's worship of her brother was a favorite topic when Anne felt like teasing her.

There was a letter from Edward in her box, a rare occurrence these days. During the busy weeks after the

operation on Mrs. Carew's eyes he had sent her news often, for Myrtle had been too busy, and Mildred was too brief. But Anne was surprised to find that he had written her again. As she scanned the sheets covered with Edward's angular script she failed to find anything of importance, yet she had an undefinable feeling that there was a reason for his writing. Mrs. Carew seemed to be getting along well, although slight heart trouble had developed since the operation, nothing alarming. Anne paused and looked up, a little frightened, at Lucille. Then she went on to find that he merely rambled through two pages of praise for Myrtle in the last busy weeks of attendance upon her mother. He wrote that she was tired and thin, but prettier than ever. She hoped that Anne was having as good a time as always and would not forget to write often. Here Anne's lips closed with the old repression of thought so common to her at home; Myrtle found Mildred rather hard to manage, he went on to say. Mildred seemed insubordinate and a little thoughtless. He thanked Anne for the substantial check that she had sent for her mother's additional expenses. Remembering what she had already done, it was most generous. Anne put down the letter, the proud tears in her eyes.

"It is none of his affair, not in the least," she said to Lucille, incoherently. "I sent that to Myrtle."

Lucille kept silent till Anne should see fit to explain. His final statement set his reader to thinking, however, and she forgot her remark of a minute ago. It was beginning to be borne in upon him that perhaps she was right after all about the future for herself and him. It all might work out differently now. He would like to be remembered to Mr. Merrick, who, he understood from

Myrtle, had been to see Anne at the college. "I suppose he thinks he 's still here, sort of spending the winter," the girl told herself bitterly as she folded up the letter and tucked it into its envelope.

"Now come home with me," Lucille begged, slipping her hand through Anne's arm.

"I really can't go out to-night," Anne protested feebly.

"You can and you shall. If anything troubles you, tell me if you like, if you don't want to, come down anyway and get a change from dormitory fare."

"It 's boiled beef and tapioca pudding at the college," Anne ruminated aloud. To herself she thought: "So soon am I doing what Lucille prophesied. Hearts are n't worn on sleeves after all. I 'll forget the letter and be gay."

And she was gay, so gay that the solemn-faced professor, who seldom unbent even to Lucille's best friends, forgot himself twice at dinner, and laughed like a boy at Anne's mimicry of Fraülein boasting to the girls of the German way of doing things.

"It does n't seem as if it could be time for you people to go," Lucille said regretfully as she stood in the hall handing Anne her furs, while the professor, once more his sober self, waited for her to be ready. Lucille's glance at Anne was worried, and Anne realized it, although she paid no attention. She knew that her cheeks were flushed and her manner unusually vivacious. She chattered quite at ease as the professor walked with her to Martha Grant Hall where the faculty meeting was to be held. As she entered the main door, a boy from the town telegraph-office stepped forward.

"Miss Carew?"

"Yes." Anne, aware of feeling unusually self-possessed and quite unsurprised, slit open the yellow envelope and read the contents while the professor watched her a little anxiously. Then she looked up and met his eyes. All at once her lip quivered, and she gazed around helplessly.

"My mother is quite ill," she said. "I ought to go home at once."

He became instantly alert. The absent, indifferent manner that he generally wore was entirely effaced.

"I will get an automobile up at the center and meet you at the door of Morgan Hall." He drew out his watch. "There is no train from here, but there is one from Hagerstown at eight-thirty. We can make it if we start in ten minutes."

"Thank you," Anne said breathlessly and turned away at once to her dormitory. Already inquisitive persons were looking toward her, the professor, and the messenger boy. She flew light-footed across the cold campus and into the warm, quiet house where the girls were already having study-hour. As she ran up the stairs to her third-floor room and passed each familiar door, she wondered if she would ever see the occupants of the rooms again. Sounds of laughter escaped from Marie Geissler's room, and from Lenore's just across the hall came a muffled sob as if some one were crying softly. Next door Amy Baxter, the fat girl, was making fudge, and the smell of the hot, creamy stuff filtered through the transom. Never again to scold or comfort or laugh with these girls who had been part of her life. Anne had no doubt, as she closed her door behind her and switched on her light, that she was leaving not to return to the college, at least to teach.

"I will come back and get my things anyway," she thought as she stood for just one moment trying to plan what she would take with her. Then she began to talk aloud.

"My purse first of all. My hat and coat and gloves. And I 'll have to wear my long cloak." Her traveling-bag was not hard to pack. It had been carrying virtually the same things for so many years that Anne was able to fill it almost by instinct and be sure that not even a clothes-brush was omitted. It could not have been more than ten minutes before she entered the reception-room to find the professor waiting for her. "I had no time to get Lucille to go with you, but I had some lunch put up for you. You can't always get breakfast on the train. I have telephoned to Harper's Ferry for your berth, and it 's all reserved."

"Thank you," Anne said simply, and for the first time she felt a desire to cry wildly, unrestrainedly. Her voice was calmer than ever because of her self-control, as she asked, "Have we surely time enough?"

"I think so. I got a good man to drive for you." Then he looked at her closely. "Do you want me to go too?"

She hesitated. She had expected that he would go as a matter of course and yet there was really no reason why he should. The thought of the long ride was not pleasant, and Anne's courage failed her. She only looked back at him mutely, but he understood, and said at once:

"I 'm perfectly willing to go and all ready."

"I 'd rather have you," she confessed, and then he helped her into the big car and got in beside her; the door banged shut, the man on the seat in front, an indistinguishable bundle of fur, started the car so suddenly

that it leaped forward like a resentful human thing, and in another second they were rushing down the cold mountain road.

Anne had her first chance to think about the trouble which all at once seemed coming nearer with the speeding of the car toward Hagerstown. One thought, which she did not dare to put into words, was always uppermost in her mind. "Suppose mother should die!" She was horrified once to find herself planning a future in which she might be living in New York, writing, meeting people she had longed always to meet, married perhaps, although she shrank instantly from this last suggestion. She felt subtly that it would never be to Edward, and she wanted no one else. Her mind returned shamefacedly to her mother. She wondered how ill she was and how suddenly she was taken. She tried to imagine what they were doing at that minute. Clearly in her mind stood out the picture of her mother as she had seen her in bed that first night after vacation, her thin face wrinkled and peevish, her scanty gray hair twisted tight upon lead curlers. All the softness and beauty which her mother once had, seemed to have left her. She had found old age unlovely and ungracious. Anne's eyes filled at the pitiful memories which came crowding in. She could see her mother at the head of the table, with the family around her, trying to hide the fact that she could not see as well as ever, feeling aimlessly for the fork which was by her plate, spilling the sugar into her saucer, and stirring her tea with proud indifference. What could be the matter that Myrtle should have telegraphed so soon after writing? Nothing in connection with her mother's eyes would call Anne home so quickly. The cold night wind whipped about her face. The bare

trees seemed to fly by in fright as the car came swooping down the road toward them. Over in the west among the foot-hills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, streaks of fog streamed like ribbons across the peaks. The stars were dim and the night seemed to thicken as they rode. Professor Bernays hardly spoke to her till they were nearing the center of Hagerstown.

"I will take that heavy coat back for you unless you want it on the way."

"Oh, I may not come back, and I had better leave as little as possible." She spoke with a catch in her voice.

He seemed to ponder this.

"Then we shall not see you again?"

"I don't know. I may come back and pack my things."

"You think your mother is very ill?" His tone was gentle. In his serious owl-like face she read real sympathy.

"I 'm afraid so." As she spoke she heard the warning shriek of the engine, and she knew by the way the man in front bent to his wheel that the train was coming.

She leaned over and felt for the handle of her traveling-bag. Everything must be ready at an instant's notice. The railroad station, a black hulk with a few twinkling lights, suddenly loomed in view at the top of the hill. In another minute Professor Bernays was helping her out of the car and the train was pulling in to the station.

"Lucille will want to hear from you," he said kindly as he held her hand for a moment at the steps to the sleeper.

"She shall, and I can never thank you for this." Anne turned impulsively toward him.

Instantly he seemed to become aware of her and of himself. His eyes shifted and when he looked at her again they were blankly indifferent. He was again the man whom Anne found so hard to know.

"Good-by," she said faintly and turned away. She stood for a minute in the vestibule waiting for the porter to tell her the number of her car, and her eyes followed the tall figure of the professor as he went toward the waiting machine. He did not once look back.

CHAPTER IX

AT the door of the Carew farm-house at eleven o'clock the next morning Myrtle met Anne with open arms.

"Oh, I 'm so glad to have you at home!" she cried in relief.

"How is mother?" Anne asked quickly.

"Lots better. There is n't any danger at all now. It was her heart, but you know she 's had these spells before. I hope you were n't dreadfully scared?"

"I did n't sleep at all last night," Anne said simply.

"My dear! Come in and let me take that heavy bag. I told Edward not to scare you. How tired you look! What did the telegram say?"

"'Mother not well,'" repeated Anne. "So Edward sent it?"

"Yes; we thought she might have a sudden turn, and we knew it was perfectly easy to get away so we sent. You always told me to do it."

"That 's right. May I go up-stairs?"

"Of course. Mildred is up there reading to mother."

"Can she be read to? Is mother well enough to be read to?"

"Oh, yes. She is n't really so ill now. What 's the matter, Anne?"

"I don't know. Relief, I guess." Anne had sunk down upon the lowest step of the front stairs and was leaning her head against the newel post.

"Well, well. Anne all done up?" Edward's voice sounded from above.

She stood up quickly.

"Hello, Edward. Mother quite all right?" Her voice was indifferent, but her heart beat a little faster as he came down to greet her.

"Mother 's just getting along fine," he said genially as he took Anne's hand in a calmly cordial grasp. "We are a little sorry we sent for you except that I wanted to be on the safe side."

"Why, certainly. And I 'm so glad mother is better." Anne gave herself a little energetic shake and all at once felt the old responsibility of the farm assail her. "What shall I do first?" Her manner was brisk.

"Cooking," laughed Edward. "Poor Myrtle is quite worn out, and I really don't think there is much in the cupboard." Anne could not help seeing the look which he bent upon Myrtle, who stood holding Anne's bag.

"Let me take the bag," he added as he bent to relieve her of it.

Anne walked toward the kitchen. She could not go up-stairs to her mother without passing the young people, who were now quite obviously engaged in gazing at each other.

"It 's just as it should be. It 's only what I 've wanted all the time," Anne told herself as she stood for a minute in the disorderly kitchen. She took an apron from behind the pantry door and tied it around her waist. "But men are easily comforted." This to the old pump. After a drink of cold, clear, spring water she went up the back stairs to her mother's room.

The house was painfully disorderly, with the distressing untidiness that descends upon a family where there

is illness. Rolls of gray dust filmed the corners of the stairs, and the upper hall had been turned into a sort of storage-room for the articles not needed in Mrs. Carew's chamber.

The door into her mother's room was open, and Anne heard Mildred's buoyant young voice slightly raised in her conscientious reading of the morning paper. She was sitting in a low white rocker by the bed, but she gave a joyous little spring for Anne when she heard her step.

"Gracious, but we 're glad to see you."

"That 's good. Well, Mother dear, it 's lovely to find you better."

Mrs. Carew accepted her daughter's kiss passively.

"Yes, I 'm better," she agreed. She was not aware of the keen look that Anne sent in her direction.

"You must be perfectly delighted to get your sight back," Anne went on cheerfully.

"Oh, yes," sighed Mrs. Carew. "But it 's been an awful expense, and then I had to be sick too, as if the operation was n't enough."

"But, Mother, think how lucky you are to come out of it so well."

"Me? Comin' out of it well? What am I goin' to do, I 'd like to know, with Myrtle marryin' Edward an' goin' off, an' you down in Maryland?"

Anne shook up the pillows and then turned to adjust the window screen. Mildred had slipped out, and she and her mother were alone. When she finally spoke, her voice was a little muffled, but her words were quite cheerful.

"Well, Myrtle won't be going yet awhile, and I think I can stay here and take care of the house very nicely if you had just as soon have me as Myrtle."

"Why, ain't you goin' to teach any more?"

"I should never teach so far away when you need me."

"But what 'll you live on? I can't give you much to stay here."

"Oh, let 's not worry about money." Anne's voice was pleasant, but a little hard. Almost without her own volition, she added, "I should be able to help you from my own bank account if I had n't spent it all on Myrtle."

Mrs. Carew appeared not to hear, and Anne felt relieved that she did not answer. The speech had been needless.

"What more can I do for you, Mother?" she asked presently, as she stood ready to go down-stairs.

"Nothing. Just tell Mildred to see about my malted milk. She knows how to fix it. You must be tired."

Anne was grateful.

"I am a little bit weary, but it 's so nice to see you again and have you better that I don't mind."

"It makes me feel good to know I can depend on you to be at home." Mrs. Carew's face softened, and her voice sounded more like the mother whom Anne had missed lately.

But as she walked down to her own room and unpacked the bag, which Edward had brought up, a sort of hopelessness settled down upon her. In the closet hung a morning dress, and this she put on.

"I shall wear morning dresses like this every day," she thought. "And some clean, sober thing for afternoon. And in the evening mother and I will play backgammon by the fire till nine o'clock, and then I shall wind the clock, and mother will fold up her shawl and put it in the library cupboard, and we shall lock the

back door and go to bed.'' Her lips quivered as she stood before the glass fastening the rather unbecoming blue-gingham dress. She turned quickly from the contemplation of her tired face and looked out of the little square window. The trees stood bleakly bare in their straight lines on each side of the white road; the pasture on the right with its gray rocks and brown hummocks was the picture of desolation, and on the left, unpainted and ill-kept, the old barn offered a battered face to the winter wind.

''This is to be my problem,'' she told herself grimly, but without warning the barn and the pasture and the curving white road swam together in one blur of tears. Anne turned from the window, shut her lips tightly, and bent to pick up her empty traveling-bag. There was a clean handkerchief left in it, and she dabbed at her wet eyes before she lifted the bag to the topmost shelf of her narrow closet. One thought shot spark-like through the blackness. ''I shall have to go to Maryland for my things, so I can get away once more. I shall be used to the idea of staying here by the time I come back.''

There were steps on the stairs and voices in the hall. Anne remembered her errand and went swiftly to the door. Mildred was just coming down the hall.

''I have the malted milk all ready, so don't you worry,'' she said. Her eyes as they rested on Anne were keenly observant. ''I hoped you were having a nap.''

''Oh, my dear, I have to cook. There is n't even a piece of bread in the house, Edward tells me. You people have had all the work up till now. Why should I rest?''

''Myrtle can cook what little we eat this noon. You must get some sleep, Anne. You look all fagged out.''

"I shall have all winter to rest in."

"You are going to stay at home?"

"I can, I think, if mother needs me. The instructor that Dr. West wanted in my place when I thought I was going to resign is still at leisure. She decided to study this winter, but I know she would accept the call if they wanted her."

"What makes you think you will be needed?" Mildred was obviously trying to make her voice non-committal.

"Mother's informal announcement of Myrtle's engagement," laughed Anne, with her back to her sister, as she carefully arranged a window-shade.

"I 'm awfully sorry about everything, Anne."

"Why, my dear, two months ago you wanted me to stay at home."

"You know perfectly well what I mean," Mildred said haughtily. "You 're just the goat, that 's all."

"You can't talk slang and be so dignified, Milly. It does n't work."

"Don't talk to me about my looks, Anne. You are a fright this minute, as I suppose you know."

"Never mind, lambie. You are the only person who will notice me all day long, and you have already proved that you can survive."

"Do as you please." Mildred tossed her head. "Look like a Killarney rose, or like butter an' eggs. It 's no use talking to you, Anne. You 've pretty nearly planned this whole thing out from the beginning; so it 's not up to me to interfere now."

"Good heavens, Mildred," Anne broke in irritably, "must we fight tooth and nail for everything we have? Would you want a thing that you begged or struggled for?"

Mildred looked at Anne, a long steady look, and Anne saw the dawn of comprehension in her little sister's eyes before she turned away.

Anne went back to her dresser and viewed herself critically in the mirror.

"You are rather a sober-looking spectacle," she told the face in the glass. "However, I think the case is n't so far along that it can't be cured."

With a guilty eye on the clock, she took out of the closet a brown corduroy skirt, and from the bureau drawer a fresh, white shirt waist, which she had not worn since summer. Then smiling reminiscently at Mildred's remark, she chose a silk scarf of rosy hue, and tied it with hurrying, half-scornful fingers under the white collar of her waist. She could not deny that the result was worth the trouble. Her spirits seemed lightened somehow by the knowledge that she was really attractive after all, and as she stood in the door of her mother's room before going down to the kitchen, she made a little curtsy, her apron on her arm.

"Please, mum, your new cook."

Mrs. Carew raised her head and looked at her, her fretfulness softened by approval that she could not hide.

"Very nice. Where did you get the tie, Anne?"

"Oh, I don't know. I never can recall where I get things. Remember old Grandma Meekins, who used to tell Belinda the price per yard of the red ribbon she bought the year Granther Clarke was married, and that was in '37?"

"Well, I 'm sure it 's a good thing to be able to remember," Mrs. Carew agreed amiably.

Anne laughed to herself, gave her mother an affectionate, half-curious look, and went down-stairs.

Edward and Myrtle were in the kitchen pretending to quarrel over who should get the potatoes from the cellar, when he looked up and saw Anne.

"It 's certainly good to have you home, Anne," he said heartily.

Myrtle disappeared down the cellar stairs with a basket on her arm, but she called back over her shoulder:

"We 're all glad, Sister Anne. We 're starving to death. Look in the pantry."

Anne put on her big apron without looking at Edward. In Myrtle's absence a certain embarrassment had fallen upon him. She could not bear yet that he should be on the old familiar footing. She went into the pantry, leaving the door hospitably open. Then as she bent busily over the molding board, she called out cheerily:

"So you children have been getting engaged?"

Edward looked about him a little helplessly, for he had a feeling that if he spoke he would be talking to himself. He could not forget how clear and gray Anne's eyes used to be as he looked into them and told her boyishly all the little things about himself in which she had never failed to be interested. His egotism was hurt now at Anne's prosaic way of treating this last experience of his. Yet he had a reassuring view of Anne's back through the open pantry door, and a comfortably dozing tiger cat blinked encouragement at him from a patch of sunshine under the kitchen table.

"Yes," he said at last. He was standing by the table now, handling some of the dishes that had come down from the sick-room, picking them up and putting them down again.

"I expect we shall be hearing the same of you soon," he added, with his eyes upon a cracked pitcher out of

which Anne's generous hand had poured him many a glass of Jersey milk in days gone by.

"I engaged? No, no." Anne reached for a big yellow bowl on the top shelf.

With both round arms above her head and her face turned entirely away from him, he could make nothing of her answer, except that she was almost too interested in her work to answer at all. When the bowl was safely down, she gave him more attention.

"Please don't think I am ever to be engaged to Mr. Merrick, Edward. Your letter spoke of his being at the college. I wrote Myrtle that he was there for exactly half an hour, and his sister was with him. They were motoring up from Washington."

"But I thought—" he stammered, his fine eyes shadowed by his doubts, "I thought—"

"Yes, I know. Well, that little scene that you refer to is one that I knew I should never have to explain, since you dismissed it all as flirting." Anne decisively broke an egg into the yellow bowl. When she spoke again her voice was quite friendly and natural. "I 'm as glad as I can be, Edward, not only that you are happy, but for Myrtle—"

Myrtle tripped lightly up the stairs at this moment, basket almost empty.

"Edward, tell John to get us some more potatoes from the shed. This is all I can find and I 've scoured the bin."

He obeyed her in silence. She sank into a chair and began fanning herself with her apron, although the kitchen was not hot. Anne received the impression instantly that she was trying to appear unconcerned.

"It 's such a comfort to have a man to order around," she declared.

Anne was measuring sugar and did not answer.

"When are you going back to Maryland, or are you going to stay here and help me get married?"

"I don't know. I 'm going to do some cooking first, and put the rooms in order in this suffering household," Anne replied briskly. "Put on the praties, Myrtle, and see if there 's any water for all those dishes, will you, please?"

"You 'd better stay and do the housekeeping," Myrtle said pettishly. She was tired out with her mother's illness, and Anne's energy annoyed her.

"I think I shall. But after you are married you 'll see more housekeeping than you ever saw yet, honey."

"I don't see why. I sha'n't live in a big barn like this. It 's no work to cook for two, and besides Edward will help."

"A doctor with a good many calls has so much time to get his own meals and keep the house dusted!" Anne could not help the sarcasm.

Myrtle reddened.

"I guess I can work if I have to," she answered shortly, and left the kitchen.

As Anne put on the potatoes and poured out the steaming water for the dishes, she made a grim resolution to keep her thoughts to herself. Anne knew that she was capable of great sacrifices for those she loved, and she took no credit for her natural gift for smoothing out other people's troubles, but she knew, too, that in the petty round of duties from day to day she would have to keep constant watch of herself, for she was no saint,

and her quick tongue was her worst enemy. She tried to beguile the time by planning a little story with Myrtle as the heroine and Myrtle's romance for its happy ending. Anne's tendency to put people whom she knew into stories was growing stronger with each new experience that showed her another side to a character or a different point of view in life. And up-stairs in Anne's pocket-book was a check from a magazine syndicate and a complimentary letter concerning Anne's little series of college-girl sketches.

"I sha'n't always brew and bake," she thought now and then when a new plot popped into her head and tantalized her with its possibilities. And so, weaving other people's romances, she baked her cake and swept her house quite as carefully as if it had been really her own, and finally at five o'clock she submitted to Mildred's taking charge of the supper while she went for a little walk in the winter twilight.

Edward was just driving down from the post-office with Nellie, the old gray horse, when Anne appeared on the back porch in cap and sweater.

"Just in time," he called. "You can drive me back up-town and save my walking. I want to leave your mother some medicine and then I 'll be ready."

But Myrtle instantly came up behind Anne in the doorway.

"I 've changed my mind, Edward," she said prettily. "I 'll drive you up after all. Mildred says it is n't very cold. Then Anne can have her walk, for she loves it."

"Both of you come," suggested Edward, stupidly.

"No, thank you." Anne's tone was crisp.

Mildred was standing near the door inside the little hall, and Myrtle held out her coat for her to help, as

Edward ran up-stairs to see Mrs. Carew. Mildred obediently slipped on the coat for her, but as she turned Myrtle about a little rudely and buttoned up the high collar under her sister's chin, she murmured spitefully: "You jealous, jealous thing."

"I 'm not."

"You are. But it 's no matter. You could n't have had him at all if Anne had n't been willing."

"Roses like yours don't need the air to improve them," Edward laughed as he looked down a moment later at his betrothed's flushed cheeks.

"It 's because I 'm tired," Myrtle answered, with a pretty air of patience.

CHAPTER X

"AND now I can't have my wedding out in the orchard as I had planned," lamented Myrtle, when Edward came to her with the news that there was a chance for him in western New York if he went at once.

"I 'm glad of it," Mildred announced cheerfully. "It might have been artistic, but if we had done very much decorating, there would n't have been any fruit left for the rest of us. Apple blossoms are artistic, but apple-pies are better."

"Well, you can have your apple-pies, greedy, long after I 've gone away and left you."

"It does seem very soon to try to plan it for this month," Anne said with a little worried frown. "Do you want many guests, Myrtle?"

"Oh, about a hundred," Myrtle said carelessly.

"Myrtle Carew! Where do you think they are going to sleep? We can't even take care of one tenth of the relatives that will come."

"Oh, they can sleep anywhere around in town. A bride never has to bother herself with what will happen to her guests."

"Very likely not," Mildred put in sarcastically, "but the rest of the family has got to live it down if you are going to act like that. You may think your wedding ends everything, but it does n't."

Myrtle did not deign to answer, but left the problem

to Anne as she always left hard things for "Sister Anne" to settle. So with a willingness that never appeared to grow less and a smile that never once hinted of tears that seemed very near the surface sometimes, "Sister Anne" planned and executed with fertile brain and nimble fingers, saved money where Myrtle declared it could not be done, lavished unexpectedly in places where her worldly wisdom promised her a good return, wrote, and shopped, and sewed, and figured at night till her little red housekeeping-book nearly burst its covers with importance, and finally, the last of November, the very limit of the time set by Edward, evolved a wedding that Myrtle was pleased to call the product of her own cleverness, especially at ten o'clock the night before the wedding, when the family assembled for the last time around the old fireplace in the living-room.

Mildred lay on the couch, with several pillows behind her head and at least three magazines gracefully disposed around her, while she nibbled an apple and prepared to read despite Anne's protests that they should all be in bed. Anne was sitting in a low chair where the lights and shadows from the fire played about her soft hair and deep eyes. She was not smiling so much now, for no one was noticing, and the fire into which she gazed seemed to hold thoughts too deep for tears. Mrs. Carew, who was persisting in sitting up although she was too sleepy to take part in any logical conversation, dosed and nodded over a copy of the "Bantam Hill Weekly." Myrtle had chosen a picturesque attitude on the hearth-rug, her head against Anne's knee. She was thinking how strange it was that this should be the night before her wedding, and yet she was seeing herself quite clearly, as the other two sisters probably saw her that evening,

happy and flushed and tired, with a halo of romance which made everything she did seem a little unreal and stirred a certain wistful envy in those around her.

"Well, we have to decorate the very first thing in the morning, and that will be practically all we 've left to do," she said aloud, following out her thoughts.

"All we have left to do?" echoed Mildred, sitting up to throw an apple core into the heart of the fire. "Well, I like that, with a supper for about forty to plan and the wedding at eight! What you ever asked those girls from The Heights to come so early for I don't see."

"Oh, we can manage beautifully." Anne looked at Mildred warningly as she spoke. She cherished a loving little fancy that nothing should disturb Myrtle this one night.

"Mother!" It was Myrtle who spoke this time and a little sharply at that. "If you are going to sit and sleep you had better go to bed. I 'm nearly dead too, as I 've been telling everybody till I know you are tired of listening. Let 's all go."

"Do you realize that we won't be together quite like this, ever again?" Anne stroked Myrtle's shining hair as she said this, and then suddenly pushed the head away and rose to her feet.

"It 's what all mothers have to bear, seeing their daughters go away and leave them." Mrs. Carew was sufficiently awake to contribute this original bit to the conversation just as Anne leaned over Mildred and gathered up the magazines.

Mildred winked at Anne naughtily and then pulled her down on the couch.

"I hope we don't lose Anne for a good long time," she answered with fervor.

"You probably won't," Myrtle said tranquilly. "Anne is too particular."

"I think Anne has a future before her." Mildred made a wide, dramatic gesture in the air.

"Thank you." Anne began to shake up the pillows unmindful of any discomfort to the occupant of the couch. "We have a future before us to-morrow all right. So let 's to bed now." But in her heart she was grateful for Mildred's recognition of the ambition that was even now stirring Anne to restlessness, while it comforted her for the loss of love.

"What do you prophesy for yourself, Mildred?" she asked as they went up the stairs together after saying good night to their mother.

"For me?" Mildred leaned backwards against the railing and smiled at Anne mischievously. "I 've always thought I 'd be the villainess of the family, fall madly in love, and elope or give you a thrill some way even if not just like that. Perhaps I shall be a moving-picture star."

"Fall in love with some one we like and then you won't have to elope."

Mildred went on up the stairs without answering, but when she said good night to Anne her tone had changed.

"I can tell you one thing right now, Sister Anne. And it 's all right to say it since I 'm not in love. I sha'n't stand for one bit of interference from you or any one else when I do fall in love. If the man is as poor as Job's turkey and as homely as a lizard, he will be *my choice* and you can just remember now that talking won't matter. You are a dear, Anne, but you handed Myrtle her man because you thought it was the thing to

do, and I tell you right now, you get all balled up when you try to help out Providence."

"Hush," cried Anne, amazed at Mildred's oratory. "Myrtle and mother are coming up-stairs."

"Myrtle, my dear," Mrs. Carew was saying, "the Lord has given you a fine husband, and I hope you 'll be properly grateful. I always thought you'd be the one to marry first. I only hope Anne and Mildred will do as well."

Anne smiled to herself as she closed her door. "It was the Lord, according to mother, but Mildred says it was Anne. I wonder?" And then as if she feared that she had been led into irreverence, she opened her Bible before she had even begun to prepare for bed. The first verse that she read led her into such deep thought that she sat for a long time looking wide-eyed into one shadowy corner of her little room. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy."

"Is n't a wedding interesting?" Mildred spoke from the top of a step-ladder, where she was fastening great yellow chrysanthemums into the background of evergreen that filled the corner where the bride was to stand.

"Very interesting," agreed Anne, a little absently as she stepped back to get the effect of the yellow and green decorations with which she had been banking the mantel.

"And we only have about two hours more before people will begin to come. Gracious me, I don't see why Myrtle wanted all those girls from The Heights to come so early when they 're only in the way."

"But Myrtle must have everything as she wants it

to-day." Anne was hardly aware of the sigh that came with the words. She placed one last graceful bit of green across the little old clock, transforming it instantly into something very gay and festive and not at all related to the warning timepiece that directed the preparation of Mildred's early breakfast during these cold winter mornings.

Mildred noticed the change at once.

"Would n't it be fine if we could always be decked out like this?"

Anne briskly removed some bits of string from the swept and garnished floor and spoke over her shoulder as she went out to press the bride's veil.

"One wedding and getting over it will be about all you 'll want."

In the kitchen she heated her irons, glad that Mrs. Salt had invited her mother to spend the day with her, away from the excitement of the preparations, and listened to Myrtle, who at that time was bemoaning the fact that her veil was not new.

"It 's lots nicer to have a real heirloom, even if it does have to be pressed," Anne told her brightly. It seemed almost like a dream now that she had hoped one day to wear that same veil herself.

Myrtle looked up from her task of counting silver spoons. Her eyes wandered across the fields where a crooked little path led through the orchard to the main road.

"It really is hard to believe that I 'm going to be married and leave you all to-day." Suddenly she dropped the spoons and came to Anne, who was gravely shaking out the veil.

"Anne," she said, and then as Anne put her arm

around her, "I think I want to cry, but I have n't any idea why."

"You 're just a little bit nervous. It 's no wonder, poor child. We 've all been working so hard."

Myrtle raised her head from Anne's shoulder with a return of her old spirit.

"Yes, it is n't much like a wedding, for you and me to be out here messing around in the kitchen while Mildred hammers and hammers in the sitting-room and mother goes visiting."

"You forget all the extra help we have coming in in about an hour, and five guests due on the next train, and then one long procession of presents and relatives all the rest of the day. Be glad of this one little bit that seems like real home." Anne's voice trembled a little on the last words.

"Sister Anne, you are a sweet thing, and I 'm complaining as usual. But would n't it be nice if—if—" Myrtle paused and fingered the filmy veil, which Anne had carefully spread upon the white-covered table.

"If what, honey?"

"Oh, if I could have been waked this morning by a maid, and had breakfast in bed, and then gone in and chatted with you a while, and afterward come downstairs and directed the caterer and the decorator, and then gone out automobiling and met the girls and taken them to a hotel for luncheon and—"

"And after all that you would have been contented with a poor doctor?" Anne looked at Myrtle keenly as she spoke.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so, only why not make Edward rich too while we are wishing? Goodness knows I wish he were."

Anne took Myrtle's pretty, petulant face in both her soft hands and stood looking steadily into it while she said in a tone that Myrtle could not soon forget:

"My dear, oh, my dear, you have the best man God could have sent you, it seems to me. Never reproach him if he cannot give you every trifle that you want. Living and working with him all through the years ought to be all any woman would ever ask."

"I am happy, indeed I am. I never meant to wish him different."

"That 's right. You must n't wish anything different; you are made to be happy, Myrtle, and I think Edward will do it."

So after all it was from Anne and not from her mother that the most solemn things came to Myrtle on her wedding-day. She found herself watching her eldest sister a little curiously after this, but she found nothing to wonder at in Anne, save an unusual beauty that seemed to depend not on coloring, for Anne was white and tired, nor yet on sparkle and wit, for Anne was singularly quiet, but on something deeper than either of these, something that Myrtle could not understand. She spoke of it to Mildred a little later, when Anne and Edward started off for some more evergreen. Myrtle had refused to go on account of her guests.

"Anne is quite radiant to-day."

Mildred watched the two out of sight and then she turned to Myrtle.

"No," she said solemnly. "There is n't anything radiant about Anne to-day. There could n't be, you see. But I think she sort of *shines*."

And even Myrtle realized the wisdom of Mildred's quaint remark.

CHAPTER XI

ANNE tried not to remember anything that occurred during the hour that she spent with Edward getting evergreen. She knew that there must be no significance attached to chance remarks, lest afterwards they return to haunt her. Edward was very happy, there was no doubt of it, but he was still unable to forget that Anne was the girl he had wished to marry. Anne would not analyze her own feelings. She laughed merrily at some of his gay little jokes and skilfuly evaded him when he turned suddenly serious. It was an undeniable relief to come safely through the hour without one single look or word that might betray her secret.

They had hardly stacked their burden in the side hall, when a raucous horn sounded again and again outside the house. Myrtle came flying down the front stairs, and Anne sped through the sitting-room forgetful that she still wore her turban and sweater. In another minute she had pulled open the unwieldy, old front door, Mildred had arrived, trailing clouds of decorations behind her, and Genevieve was surrounded.

"You dear Anne,"—this between breathless little laughs,—"you look as nice as ever. And the bride here, too? Myrtle, you are n't a bit excited, are you? Mildred, don't hug me so tight. Here 's Bynner, begin on him," and Genevieve made her way into the sitting-room, drawing off her gloves as she spoke.

"Jove, Anne, but you look stunning in that woodsy

get-up. A piece of evergreen stuck to your hair too! Going to wear that costume to the wedding?''

''Of course. I 'm to represent a druid. Genevieve, I 'll take your things up-stairs and show you where you are to dress. Bynner can make himself useful for a while.''

Genevieve began gathering her belongings, which she had already strewed generously about the room.

''It 's been ages since I 've seen you, Anne,'' she reproached her.

Anne's smile faded for a minute.

''I know it.''

''And you bet I rushed here with the greatest of glee as long as it was n't your wedding,'' Bynner put in wickedly.

''Then I 'm not to expect you at mine?'' Anne's tone was demure.

They all laughed.

''I should like to be on the spot without coming,'' he declared, unabashed.

But Anne had already disappeared, with Genevieve following.

''Where is your mother?'' Genevieve asked.

''At Mrs. Salt's. She is one of our neighbors and asked mother to spend the day there. We thought it better to get her away from the excitement as she is n't very well.''

''And you are happy, Anne?''

There was a silence that might have been due to the fact that Anne had gone ahead to open the door of the little guest-room.

''It 's cold in here,'' she said, and shivered. ''I 'm as sorry as I can be, Gene, but you won't have to stay

up here to-day, and I 'll have an oil stove to heat it up before night. They smell so I did n't like to bring one up till I had to."

Genevieve paid no attention to the apology.

"Are you happy?" she repeated steadily.

"Of course. You might have had the big room you had the last time you were here, but some of the relatives who are to stay all night had to have that."

"How very interesting! It has so much to do with my question." She caught Anne by the shoulders. "Anne, you are the best friend I have. Are you going to shut me out?"

Anne gazed back at Genevieve through a sudden whelm of tears.

"Don't," she said unsteadily. "I can't talk to-day. Please don't ask anything. We can talk to-morrow."

"All right. Just tell me one thing. Why did n't you go back to Maryland and pack up your own things and come to us for a week as you had planned. You might have had one more vacation anyway."

Anne hesitated, then she spoke frankly.

"Myrtle wanted to buy some clothes and Harriet Edmands, a girl down-stairs,—Myrtle met her at The Heights,—wanted her to come to New York. We decided that Lucille could pack up my things quite as well as I, and so I did n't go back."

"But you never let people do things like that for you."

Anne flushed.

"She had wanted to ever since she heard I was n't coming back."

"Of course she lots preferred doing that for you to seeing you."

Genevieve's tone was ominously incredulous.

"Oh, of course she wanted me to come," faltered Anne. "Where is your suitcase, Genevieve?"

"Bynner has it. I still don't see how Myrtle's trip to New York interfered with you."

"It did n't very much," Anne answered desperately.

"Now, look here, Anne Carew. I hope this continual sacrifice is over. You think I 'm blind, don't you? And a little bit simple into the bargain? Well, I know perfectly that Myrtle took what money you had and went to New York with it. And you stayed here and let your friends in Maryland write you how sorry they were that you did n't care to come back."

"Myrtle has been very sweet about doing without things," Anne began, but her words balked and she finished weakly, "I should like to have done more for her, but we could n't."

"No, I should say not," was Genevieve's dry comment.

"I can't talk without working." Anne came to herself briskly. "Come down-stairs whenever you are ready," she added at the door. Her eyes seemed to seek Genevieve's as if for forgiveness. The other pulled her close.

"You little fool!" she said roughly through her tears.

CHAPTER XII

"WE 'LL give you a good whiskey sling, and that will brace you up," Bynner suggested daringly to Mrs. Carew when she complained that her heart was palpitating at the very thought that in half an hour Myrtle would be married.

Mrs. Salt, who had rustled up to the group where Anne and Genevieve stood with Mrs. Carew, held up her hands in shocked amazement.

"My dear young man!" she exclaimed, with her usual incoherent energy. "Whiskey, and to the mother of a bride—to say nothing of the temperance side of the question? I have had Mrs. Carew with me to-day and I have done my best to keep her calm and cool."

"Prescribe for me, too," Anne said, with a twinkle in her eyes. "I 'm nervous also."

"Can't you come out and play tag? That 's very quieting," he suggested. Anne glanced down at her lace dress.

"Tag is just the thing. So good of you to hit upon the remedy at once. But do take care of mother," she added anxiously, as her eyes followed her mother and Mrs. Salt, obviously intent upon moving away from the precincts of such a deluded person as Bynner. Then Anne looked at the clock. "I must go to Myrtle now. You 'll make yourself agreeable to all the guests, won't you? The Washington Heights girls are already in the dining-room, looking at you slant-wise."

"Do you trust me?" he bantered. "Give my love to the bride. I was frightfully jealous of Sewall once on a time, I remember, and I quite blew myself on Myrtle's wedding present out of sheer relief."

"Dear me, I never realized that you had such an expensive feeling for me," mocked Anne as she turned away.

"Anne!" His voice arrested her. He was quite serious now.

"Please don't waste time over injured feelings, little boy. I don't demand it as the other girls do, and a grieved look is n't becoming to you since you 've taken on flesh." Anne hardly would have ventured this last without the accompaniment of a flashing smile.

As it was, he muttered:

"You shall pay me for that, Mistress Anne."

But she turned a scornful back upon him.

Up-stairs she found Myrtle, her cheeks glowing, her breath quick with excitement. The room was very light, for Myrtle had placed candles in every available corner. The air was close and stiflingly sweet. On the bed lay the gleaming satin that was Myrtle's wedding dress, and over it the misty veil that she was soon to wear. A traveling-bag, half-open, was placed upon a chair where it might be filled with the last few things. On a hanger on the door was the blue broadcloth traveling suit that would be donned in such a hurry at the last. The waist and gloves and hat were close by. Anne had seen to everything.

"Write to us as soon as you can," she said now, as she closed the sagging, old-fashioned door and came forward across the little room, unfamiliar now in all this last significant confusion.

"Of course I will. As soon as I know the number of the apartment I 'll write you that, too. Don't talk to me or you 'll mix me up. I have so many things to think about I don't know what I 'm putting on. It 's lucky you got dressed early, Anne."

A knock at the door and Mildred looked cautiously in.

"I nearly got killed the last time I knocked, but I suppose she 'll receive the bridal bouquet." She pushed into the room a large square box.

"Take it across the hall and open it. We can't have all the stuff in here," was Myrtle's decree.

"I can't take it anywhere. The uncles and aunts are dressing all over the house," complained the young messenger, pushing the box still farther in.

"Mildred, don't be contrary," Myrtle said, stamping. "I will not have all that paper and string in here. There is n't room."

"Just wait till I get married. I 'll show you the proper way—" But the door was firmly closed upon the advocate of the proper way, and Myrtle proceeded with her dressing. It was only at the end, half an hour later, that she drew a deep breath as she looked in the glass at the pretty face behind the misty veil. Her flowers were on her arm, safely shorn of their scorned outer wrappings, and there were lilies-of-the-valley in her veil to match the ones she carried. Not a reasonable wish of hers had been left ungratified by the gentle older sister, who stood watching her now with sweet, inscrutable eyes.

As the veil had first dropped over Myrtle's head, Anne had been aware of a little sick feeling that she found indescribable. Myrtle radiant in wedding finery hardly

seemed like Myrtle until the memory of Edward stamped the fact with a solemn seal.

"It is sort of an impressive thing, is n't it?" Myrtle asked in an awed voice.

"Yes." Anne barely breathed her answer.

Myrtle's lip suddenly quivered.

"I hope he 'll be good to me."

"You must be good to him," Anne answered sternly.

In a flash the old Myrtle returned.

"Of course I will. Don't preach. What time is it, Anne?"

"Nearly eight. I must go and see that mother is all right. She looks very nice, Myrtle. You must tell her so after—after it is all over. It will please her."

"All right! I 'll tell her anything," Myrtle replied good-humoredly. "You have been a dear to me, Anne, I 'll pay you back some day. Do you suppose the girls from The Heights will like my dress?"

"Of course they will. The clock will strike in a minute. I *must* go. I 'll come right back."

Anne's hurried trip through the down-stairs rooms took only a minute. She saw that her mother would stand nearest to the decorated corner where the ceremony would take place, and that Mrs. Salt and old Marm Hussey were placed so that they might see the bridal procession. She said a few cheery words to her mother at the very last minute, noting with a strange tenderness new to her that the thin form was shaking with nervous excitement, and then she disappeared from among the guests. On the way up-stairs again she rescued Mildred's basket of flowers, which she nearly lost in the frantic effort to signal to the best man, and then, as if

the waiting guests sensed the approaching moment, a slight hush immediately preceded the striking of the sitting-room clock.

"Does n't sound like our old clock, does it?" whispered Mildred irrepressibly. "It 's all of a shake."

"Hush," cried Myrtle, petulantly, from the head of the stairs, and then Genevieve began to play the wedding march very softly.

Myrtle reached back to sweep her train away from the door, whispering to Anne as she did so:

"Do you suppose Edward will meet me in the right place? I do hope Charley has the rings safe. Edward says Charley never got anything right yet. Shall we go down? Where are your flowers, Anne? Am I all right?"

"Yes, all ready. Be careful of your veil, Myrtle."

"Imagine walking down these narrow, splintery old stairs in a wedding veil," said Myrtle under her breath, but Mildred, just ahead, turned around with a wicked twinkle.

"Never mind, Myrtie, you can't possibly do it more than three or four times." But Myrtle was rescuing her dress from a rough place on the tread and did not notice. Despite herself, Anne smiled. People were so true to their own characteristics even at such a time as this.

And then as in a dream she slowly took her way down the stairs, and where the lower hall curved into the parlor she saw the slender, unfamiliar figure in its trailing white robes take the arm of her sturdy uncle Peter, and she tried not to remember how Myrtle had always ridiculed his stinginess, and Mildred had called him Peter Rabbit. Edward was there, too, and Charles Sias, looking very intense and stony in the agony of the mo-

ment. Just then Edward turned and looked at Anne, and she bravely met his eyes. He was unusually pale, and his fine lips were closely shut. But as she gazed back at him for a long moment, her own eyes dropped.

CHAPTER XIII

"HERE 'S another book I wish you 'd look over. Seems to me it ain't the thing for our young folks." Miss Hettie Noble opened a drawer of her meticulously neat desk and with gingerly touch removed from a far corner the latest addition to the Bantam Hill library. "Sometimes I think the committee don't really take the time to see what we do need here," she remarked plaintively as she handed the book to Anne. Miss Hettie was a faded, appealing little woman. Mildred disliked her because she said she sniffled, but Anne had come to respect the unselfish humility that kept Miss Hettie at home with a helpless and irritable old aunt and the little niece who had been left to the family as a bitterly sweet reminder of a wayward younger sister. Romance had touched Miss Hettie once, but the little girl for whom she was working now was the child of her sister and Miss Hettie's own lover, and the fleeting happiness of fifteen years ago had not been sufficient to make life easy for Miss Hettie. Anne always felt a secret attraction to the little librarian, whose shattered romance seemed to fit her in Anne's eyes for the heroine of a story.

"She ain't any excuse for writing a book like that," Miss Hettie went on earnestly. When speaking to Anne her carefully cultivated English fell away under the stress of her eager friendliness. Anne did not realize

how worshipful were the eyes that Miss Hettie turned upon her.

"Do you know her?" asked the girl, pleasantly. Her mind, if the truth be told, was just then upon the fact that Mildred was due to be out of school in another minute and that she must overtake her before she left for home.

"Yes, I know her. She used to live right here in Hammerton till she was married. She got a nice man and has some pretty children. Would n't you think she 'd be ashamed to write such trash?"

"Well, you see, I have n't read it yet." Anne smiled. She glanced at the title and then at the clock. "Am I to take it home? I must meet Mildred now."

"Yes; only keep it away from that child. She does n't want to spend her time on the likes of that."

"I shall be afraid of you, Miss Hettie, when I begin to write."

"Are you going to write, Anne? How splendid!" Miss Hettie spoke as if success were already assured.

"I 'm going to write a book on Bantam Hill," Anne laughed back over her shoulder as she went out.

Miss Hettie shook her head.

"Personalities ain't safe," she pronounced cryptically.

But Anne had gone.

It was only a few steps from the modest little library over Cy Whittredge's store to the post-office where Mildred would stop on her way from school. Just as she came down the steps from the store Anne caught sight of her little sister's red sweater and flying curls. Mildred saw her at the same time and waved an exuberant greeting. She was holding a bunch of letters, and when

she had come up to Anne she thrust one torn envelope into her hand, explaining breathlessly:

"It 's from Harriet Edmands, that nice Heights girl that was at the wedding, and she wants me to visit her. Think of it, she 's remembered me all these months, and she is planning a Washington's birthday house-party and she has asked me."

Anne's eyes rested indulgently on Mildred's sparkling face. But she spoke with an effort as if reluctant to discuss the subject in hand.

"Why don't you wear a hat, dear? Your hair is all blown into a tangle."

"A hat!" Mildred's tone was superbly indifferent. "Who wants to bother with a hat? Did you hear one word I said about Harriet? Anne, their house is enormous, and they have servants and automobiles, and go to parties all the time. Myrtle used to talk a lot about Carrie Edmands, who is Harriet's older sister. And there are two brothers, too. Why, Anne, think of seeing somebody besides Herbert Gray and Sam Ballou."

"You used to like Herbert very much once."

"I know, but I 've outgrown him, Anne. That was last September. Myrtle used to tease me a lot about him and that made me think of him more, but since she 's gone we never seem to talk of anything but books and what 's in the newspaper and funny things that happen, and I 've sort of forgotten all that nonsense."

"So you want to resume it again?" Anne teased her. "You are too young for lovers, little girl."

"I 'm not too young for good times. I 'm nearly through high school, and I 'm just at the age when I 'll enjoy myself more than I ever will again. You don't want me to be stunted and starved like that man you were

reading about last night who never had any fun when he was a boy."

"You don't seem to me particularly stunted yet, dear."

By this time the two were well on their way down the country road toward home. The February afternoon was drawing to a close, and the gray, frozen road ahead of them had taken on a faint rosiness from the sunset sky.

Mildred looked up at Anne a little shrewdly.

"I 'm not going to turn out as you want me to, Anne. You 'd like me to be taking in this scenery and then spouting to you, 'The road was a gypsy's ribbon over the purple moor,' and instead of that I don't really care two straws for sunsets and moonrises. I want to go off somewhere and have a perfectly corking time, ride and skate and dance and laugh and eat and never once hear mother peeving around about the price of meat and the slack way John does the chores. I 'm sick of it all."

"But there are young people here," ventured Anne.

"Where are they? Not young folks like the kind you and Myrtle used to have such fun with. I always waited patiently, thinking that my time would come too, but where is the fun? Everybody 's away or working or a fool like Sam."

"Mildred!" remonstrated Anne, shocked.

"I don't care. You 're older, and I suppose you don't mind it so much, but it 's pretty hard on me never to have any fun."

"Yes," assented Anne, whimsically. "I 'm almost too old to be allowed the excitement of coming up-town to meet you, which is all I do during the day, besides the housework."

"Anne, I was horrid. I feel real mean and piggish to-day. But if you 'll just let me talk a little about going to Harriet's and not squelch me so often, I think I 'd feel better."

"But why talk about it, honey, if it is n't going to be possible?" Anne's tone was gentle, but she avoided Mildred's eyes and glanced over the letters in her hand. She tried to put her mind upon them and forget the disappointment that was so poignantly expressed in the long pause which followed.

"There is a letter from Myrtle to mother, and one to you from that New York place. All the rest are advertisements." Mildred tried when at last she spoke to make her voice quite natural. The spring had gone out of her step, but she did not tease or sulk, merely walked quietly along at Anne's side, twisting, as she walked, a piece from the end of Harriet's heavy linen envelope.

Anne's heart smote her. She did not feel like discussing the question with Mildred till she had thought out all possible ways and means, but the girl's swift renunciation made it hard. Mildred saw the cloud on Anne's face.

"What do you think," she began confidentially, "Sally Andrews took supper last night with Belinda Meekins, and Belinda thinks your stories are wonderful. She has read some of the newspaper ones and all the syndicate series. You should have heard her prophecies for your future. Sally said it was thrilling. And, Anne, when you are rich, we 'll both have fun, won't we? And you can take me to places where I 'll be just as happy as I would at Harriet's. I ought to have known there was

no money for me to go on now, but I was a little gump as usual."

Anne could not bear any more.

"Mildred, you are a darling. If there 's a possible way, you shall go. Open that envelope for me, just for luck. There is supposed to be a check in it for some Washington's birthday suggestions."

"But I would n't use that," Mildred protested.

"Never mind. Open it and let 's see what we have."

Mildred obediently opened it, and read the little yellow slip.

"It 's for two dollars and a half," she said solemnly.

Anne looked at her blankly and then laughed in such whole-hearted appreciation of her own inadequacy that Mildred was forced to join.

"Two dollars and a half," she echoed. "Why, I expected at least eight."

"There 's a letter," Mildred added, exploring the envelope.

"Oh, of course, but that does n't help any." However, Anne took the letter, and read it aloud. The firm had decided to buy only one of the suggestions at present, and were enclosing the money for that one. They would keep the rest on file.

"Yes, they 'll be so timely after they 've been filed for six months," Anne burst out in a flash of righteous indignation at the ways of editors.

"Well, I can't go far on that," Mildred laughed. "So now you can keep it for church dues."

But Anne was thinking. She had gone far enough toward encouraging Mildred to be loath to give up the slight hope that she had offered.

"When must you answer?" she asked finally.

"Oh, I don't suppose Harriet cares. It 's only two weeks till the party, though."

"Well, don't answer till Saturday. I 'll tell you then what we can do."

"Please don't make yourself miserable, Anne, trying to do this for me," Mildred begged. But her eyes were bright. Anne, to her, could do almost anything she set her mind to. And if Anne tried to make it possible for her to go to Harriet's, she would succeed.

Mrs. Carew was waiting for them in the kitchen. She had started the early supper, and was now sitting by the window in her low, creaking rocker, her thin figure in its melancholy black dress seeming all the slighter when emerging from the dusky shadows.

"Well, I thought you two would never come," she began as soon as the girls entered the kitchen. "John, he 's goin' to a dance to-night, and he wants his supper in about half an hour. He 's out finishing the milkin' now."

"And we have a letter from Myrtle," Anne cried triumphantly.

"She write to you again?" Mrs. Carew asked in quick irritation. "The last letter was to you, too."

"This is for you, Mother," Anne said gently. "We all want to hear it. I 'll just get my things off and light the lamp, and then you can read it while I finish the supper."

Anne and Mildred came back from the little hallway with smooth hair and wind-reddened cheeks; Anne tied her apron on and began to set the kitchen table for John; the tea-kettle sang merrily, and beside the yellow kerosene lamp Mrs. Carew bent over her daughter's letter,

but still she did not offer to read it aloud. Some latent loyalty in her tired, querulous mother heart balked at revealing the stark selfishness of that carelessly scrawled message.

"Is Myrtle well?" Mildred asked innocently.

"Yes; she 's well," answered her mother, without looking up.

After a little she rose and went into the sitting-room, and a minute later John came in for his supper. He slumped into a kitchen chair and dragged it closer to the table, upon which Anne had put a steaming, savory dish.

"Dead tired!" he volunteered laconically.

"And you 're going out to-night?" Anne asked him. She liked this great honest toiler who came and went so unostentatiously, doing what was set for him to do, and apparently possessed of the inestimable gift of contentment.

"Oh, yes," he replied. He was already eating, with noisy appreciation of the stew, but he addressed her between mouthfuls. "Sereny, she wants I should go," he added sheepishly. And then with an attempt at humor: "I might 's well please her now. I calculate there 'll be plenty of time for her to wait on me later."

Anne smiled at his childlike acceptance of a husband's rights, and afterwards when she was in the pantry, apparently occupied with her work, she watched him curiously. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up, and in the lamplight his red arms looked as tough as hickory. His eyes, blue and very keen, were bent at present on his plate, and his left hand plied continuously between his mouth and his large, deep soup-plate. The stew was hot, and he blew each spoonful with vociferous energy,

while yet it was in process of transit. Later in the evening, his brown arms decorously covered, his big throat fastened into a shiny collar, he would be dancing, moist-browed and open-mouthed, with Serena Hankins, Mrs. Overlock's "girl." Anne smiled and sighed and reached for the bread knife. She would hardly object to a dance herself this evening, with a gay ride up to the hall in the cool starry night, and somebody whom she liked very much to bring her home, breathless and music-haunted, from the frolic. Shame upon her in her settled old spinsterhood! Had not Mildred told her that she should be too old for fun? She recalled days not so far back when Mildred would not have dared to tell her that. What had made the difference?

But far more important than anything else loomed the problem of Mildred's going away. Somehow, Anne promised herself as she planned and figured, with tight-shut lips, it must be managed.

While she moved mechanically about the kitchen and pantry, Anne, without knowing why, began to think of her father, and of how different home might have been for them all if he had lived.

He had died when she was ten, and she still recalled as if it were yesterday the long sunny mornings when she rode down the hot white road with him to Hammerton or Froberg, where he sold his raspberries or peaches to chattering, dark-skinned fruit dealers, who pulled her curls and gave her sticks of pink-striped candy. She could see her father distinctly, tall and hollow-cheeked, stooping a little wearily on the hard high seat of the market wagon. But he never frowned upon her, and his smile was unforgettably sweet. Who would have minded poverty or sacrifice with him?

John finished his stew and a generous piece of mince-pie.

"You are some cook, Miss Anne!" he commented as he gulped his last cup of tea and scraped back his chair. She thanked him with a smile, and still smiling watched him heave his great body up through the narrow back staircase.

"Ain't he a powerful figger of a man?" mocked Mildred, in a whisper, as Anne turned. "What a wonderful thing education is, is n't it? Why, he 'd be on the college foot-ball team."

"And you 'll probably play with men at Harriet's party who are n't half as worth while as he is," mused Anne, falling into her mood.

"But let us hope they do not conduct an orchestra while they eat."

" 'Ay, there 's the rub,' " quoted Anne. "Let 's get polish and a real man inside, Milly dear."

"You did have one like that once," Mildred said impulsively.

"One, two, three, four pieces of cake left. Mercy, I must bake to-morrow. Milly, run in and see if the sugar bowl needs filling."

Mrs. Carew followed her youngest daughter out into the kitchen when Mildred came back with the bowl.

"Can't I help?" she asked as she stood in the pantry doorway and watched Anne down on her knees by the sugar bucket.

"No, thanks. Everything 's done. But you can tell me what Myrtle wrote," Anne answered cheerfully. She knew that her mother always enjoyed talking about Myrtle.

This time, however, a shadow rested upon Mrs. Carew's face.

"Oh, there 's no special news," she said.

"Well, then let 's have supper. I 'm starved." Mildred's tone was just a little over-blithe, and Anne's eyes detected an indifference on the girl's face that did not match the eagerness in her voice. That the disappointment over Harriet's party would be keen, Anne knew only too well, but how to remedy the matter was another question.

She thought about it as she ate her supper and tried to plan a way for her little sister to be given her chance for a good time.

"Mildred has been invited to a house-party," Anne told her mother casually as they were finishing supper.

"My land, who by?" Mrs. Carew's tea-cup was suspended as she waited an answer to her question.

"Harriet Edmands. She was here for Myrtle's wedding. Perhaps you don't remember her."

"Indeed I do. I never saw so much lavender silk on one girl in all my life, taking all her clothes together."

Anne laughed outright, but her mother did not smile. She was earnestly contemplating Mildred.

"What has she got to take with her?" she asked.

Anne looked her surprise.

"Why, I was n't even sure that we could afford to let her go."

"I want my girls to have every chance." Mrs. Carew's voice was firmly sacrificial.

"All right, then," suggested Mildred, airily. "Write me a check for twenty-five dollars."

"There 's the new kitchen faucets," her mother pondered, paying no attention to this last practical remark.

Mildred put down her knife and fork with a clatter.

"And let Anne lug water back and forth from that old woodhouse pump? No, ma'am. I 'd like to go to Harriet's, but I won't go on the kitchen faucets."

"But I was n't even sure I wanted to order them, so if mother is willing, you might as well have the money."

"Well, I won't; that 's flat!" Mildred folded her napkin with a flourish.

"If mother wants you to go, there 'll be a way," Anne whispered as they gathered around the fire later.

"I hope so." Mildred sounded dubious, although she smiled. "The party is n't worth all this talk."

"Yes, it is. It will teach you things that school never can, or all your reading. The more I think of it the more I agree with mother."

Mrs. Carew came in at that moment, drawing her shawl more closely about her shoulders, as she sank into her arm-chair with a sigh.

Anne rose from beside Milly and went to get her sewing. As she passed her mother's chair she laid one hand lightly on Mrs. Carew's head.

"You are n't very happy to-night, Mother Carew," she accused her gently.

Mrs. Carew moved uncomfortably. She particularly disliked to have any one touch her hair.

"I 've been thinking about Myrtle," she said.

"What about her?" Anne was still behind her mother's chair, but her eyes were on the fire, and a far-away look was creeping into them.

"She is n't very happy, and I 'm sure I don't know whose fault it is."

"Well, I 'm thankful we are n't out there to be blamed for it." Mildred bent over her book and appeared to

dismiss the subject. But Anne knew that she was not so indifferent as she seemed.

Her mother's sharp, "There 's no call for that, Mildred," was quite enough, and Anne said merely:

"May I see the letter or would you rather tell me about it?"

"Oh, you might as well see it," Mrs. Carew said, and reached up to Anne the letter, which she took from her apron pocket.

"May I hear it too?" Mildred asked humbly, and after a moment Anne began to read aloud. Myrtle wrote:

And who should come in last evening but Genevieve? She looked as if she had just stepped out of a Fifth Avenue shop, and Bynner, who was with her, is as great a dandy as ever. Edward had come in late from a long case, and I had gone to sleep in the sitting-room waiting for him. My hair was all frowsy, and there was n't a thing in the house fit to give them to eat. I was going to open a can of soup for Ed when he came in, but I could n't offer Genevieve just that. And I had on that odious, blue house-dress that never did hang right. I have n't taken good care of it because I don't like it, and I suppose it was n't sufficiently clean to suit Genevieve's critical eye. Ed was mean enough to find fault about it afterwards, but if I can't go to sleep in my own house in the evening without dressing all up expecting some of Anne's rich friends, then I 'll make Edward live where all I 'll have to do will just be to keep nice. Sometimes I get too tired to bother at all, and he certainly is grumpy once in a while. I suppose all married life is alike. It does n't really matter whom you try it out on. I had a letter from Alicia Norcross the other day. She married a man with about fifty thousand a year, and it made me ill to read of all the fun. If Ed would only make a lot of money quick I should be perfectly happy, for he really

is lots nicer than the men some of the girls have. Even Alicia's man drinks all the time, and belongs to so many clubs she never can trace him when he forgets to come home to a dinner-party. I suppose Anne is keeping house and reading Chaucer between whiles. My love to her and Milly. I wrote you all that about Genevieve because I suppose she 'll write the whole thing to Anne. I never thought Genevieve liked me very well. I certainly thought her brother was an awful flirt.

Edward sends love, MYRTLE.

Anne folded the letter without remark, dropped it into her mother's lap, and went to get her sewing. As she came back, she said easily:

"Myrtle is all right. She 's just getting adjusted. That call from Genevieve would do her good."

"Just the same I should like to plan to have Mildred go to that house-party," Mrs. Carew said firmly. "I want her to marry money."

"Mother," cried Anne, in dismayed rebuke. She looked at Mildred, but the brown head was bent industriously over the book on her lap.

Mrs. Carew rocked on, unmoved.

"I know more than you think I do, Anne. Money is the root of all evil, I suppose, but it keeps some people happy where there ain't nothing else that would. I don't mean anything special about Mildred." She refused to see Anne glance desperately toward her little sister. "But I want her to know what money can do, and she 'll see that at Harriet's."

"Yes, she 'll see that at Harriet's," Anne assented, but her voice was dreary.

"Love ought to count for something," Mildred put in, looking up suddenly.

"Oh, let 's change the subject," said Anne.

CHAPTER XIV

ANNE waked early on the twenty-second of February, and found the world outside still and snow-covered. Not a sound, not even the jingle of a sleigh-bell disturbed the morning quiet. White fields, snow-thatched barn, and unbroken road met her eyes through the open east window. Perhaps the sight of the road gave Anne her idea, perhaps she was only trying to forget the fact that Mildred was away and that a long, quiet holiday stretched out in front of her. At all events, Anne, warm and rosy from a cold bath and hurried dressing, was in the little side hall, pulling a knitted skating-cap over her head when John clumped in from the barn, stamping the snow from his shoes and talking volubly to nobody in particular about the weather. Suddenly he looked up and saw her.

"Ain't calculatin' to go out, are you?" he inquired in surprise.

She nodded as she drew on a pair of heavy gloves.

"I 've made the cereal, and I 'll have the paths all shoveled before mother gets up."

"Now look at here," he expostulated, "I always do them paths right after the mornin' chores."

"I want to go out and play in the snow, John, so don't be surprised if I shovel a boulevard all the way up to Rocky Raymond."

He grinned at her then and turned away, but he

added over his shoulder some advice that disclosed the wisdom of the smile.

"Don't work too hard shovelin' off that mood of yours, Miss Anne."

She only laughed in answer and, shouldering her shovel, trudged out into the glistening, white world. The radiance of the sun on the snow almost dazzled her, and the cold air whipped still more color into her cheeks. She hummed as she bent to her work, and then as the spirit of the clear early morning began to act upon her, she sang aloud, oblivious to everything about her. Anne had never been specially musical, but she always sang when she was alone, sometimes making up little songs of her own when her memory failed her. She began one now, and was well along in the second stanza, holding a note courageously till she found a rhyme for "shine," when her mother's voice sounded unexpectedly from the porch.

"Anne Carew, what are you doing?"

"Sewing buttons on mince-pies, Mother dear," Anne answered saucily, as she leaned on her shovel and took a long breath.

"Well, I don't think it looks very well for you to be out shovelin' paths. Besides, it 's almost eight o'clock."

"My goodness! I did n't dream it was so late." Anne left her path unceremoniously and ran up through the dry snow to the door.

Mrs. Carew stood shivering over the kitchen stove, her gray knitted shawl drawn tightly across her shoulders. Her face was querulous and one cheek slightly swollen from neuralgia. Anne looked at her and felt a quick wave of pity for the mother whose life seemed to be made more unlovely with each succeeding year.

She shook the snow from her cap, and then crossed the room and kissed her mother lightly on each cheek.

"It 's just beautiful outdoors this morning," she said a little wistfully.

Mrs. Carew shivered at Anne's cold touch, but she smiled despite herself and felt better for it.

"This weather don't agree with me," she answered, and turned to put the breakfast dishes on the table. Anne looked at her for a moment with a curious expression, almost as if she was making up her mind to say something. She evidently thought better of it, for she hummed another little tune as she cut the bread and dished the cereal.

John did the morning chores more expeditiously than usual and broke out the road from the Corners to the Salts' land, after which he came back and asked permission to have an early dinner and then go uptown to a candy-pulling arranged by Serena Hawkins and others. Mrs. Carew warned him that he would be stuck in the snow before he got there and catch his death of cold besides, but John faced both issues cheerfully, and about two o'clock he jingled off to call for Serena, whose part in the performance of the afternoon appeared to be to furnish the molasses and to bring John.

Mrs. Carew's neuralgia grew steadily worse, and when Anne came down with a book after dinner, she found her mother huddled disconsolately over the fire. Anne was wearing a red dress that she had worn the year before at a Washington's-birthday dinner at the college. She was far from Maryland and the girls to-day, but the same spirit that had sent her singing into the snow in the morning had bade her look her prettiest that after-

noon. She would not confess even to herself how she longed to have the day as much of a success as she could make it.

Mrs. Carew looked up as she came in.

"Got your red dress on?" she inquired.

"Yes; let 's have a party, Mother," Anne said as she put her book down on the table and drew an arm-chair up to the fire.

"What kind of party?" The older woman's tone was encouragingly neutral. She appeared at least open to suggestion.

"If only your neuralgia was well enough so you could take that cloth off your face!"

Mrs. Carew surveyed herself thoughtfully in the low mirror that hung near her.

Anne pressed her advantage while her mother's eyes were still taking in the dubious ornamentation of the cloth that she had bound fantastically about her left cheek.

"We could dress up, I thought," the gentle voice hurried on, "and light the red candles that I have upstairs, and maybe telephone to Belinda Meekins and Mrs. Salt to come in if the roads are in shape so they can, and then it would really seem like a holiday."

"I never did think much of a holiday in the winter," Mrs. Carew put in, but she was interested nevertheless. "And there ain't anything I can wear," she added.

"Wear your black and lavender silk," Anne suggested daringly, and added with consummate tact, "Mrs. Salt has never seen it, and you hardly ever get a chance to wear it."

"Why do you want to do anything that 'll make all that work?"

Anne sank down on a low stool near Mrs. Carew and looked into the fire.

"Well, you see, at Mount Holyoke we always did things to celebrate; we made it a real party day, and at Schull College the girls did the same. It keeps them from being homesick."

"Homesick!"

"You see lots of the girls are used to gay doings every holiday, and when the regular college routine stops it 's natural that they welcome fun."

"It seems to me that there 's an awful lot of chasin' after fun in this world," Mrs. Carew remarked gloomily. "Not that I don't want you to have it, for I 've always tried to let you do just as you wanted to, but us older people get a different view of things."

And then Anne said the thing that she had decided not to say in the morning.

"Yes, mother dear, I think that 's just it. You are n't nearly as happy with us all as you used to be."

Mrs. Carew's lips quivered.

"I ain't got you all. Here 's your father gone,—most women have a husband to look out for them,—and now Myrtle is way off, and not very well either." She paused to meet Anne' sudden upward glance, but the expression in the girl's eyes could not be interpreted.

"Myrtle not very well?" Anne echoed.

"No; I was goin' to tell you about it, but I thought I 'd let you read her letter instead." Mrs. Carew did not meet her daughter's eyes. She had ideas of her own regarding the discussion of certain topics. But she had made clear to Anne what she meant, and waited for the daughter's reception of her news.

Anne was gazing straight into the fire now, however,

and did not answer. Myrtle, the blue-eyed little sister of the tripping feet and wilful voice—Myrtle, tall and mysterious in her wedding veil; Edward with the riddle in his eyes on the day of his marriage and the one clear message he had seemed to send her against his will when they faced each other at the foot of the stairs; Myrtle and Edward now with this new happiness to bind them together; the memories that marched by as Anne watched the fire, she would hardly confess even to herself. She jumped up after a second and leaned over her mother.

"All the more, let 's have a party," she said like a little girl.

Mrs. Carew yielded.

"Well, I don't know as I care. The sittin' room ain't been dusted to-day, and there 's not much to eat, and Mildred ain't here to help. I miss her, too, to-day, but I s'pose I can take this cloth off if I stay right near the fire, and I will say I ain't seen Belinda Meekins nor Mis' Salt for a long spell."

Anne had the room dusted before her mother had finished speaking.

"That ain't the way to dust," Mrs. Carew reproved her, but her tone indicated her forgiveness of Anne's methods.

"We are to use candles," Anne said airily, "and we can't waste time being pernickety. You call up the people, Mother. This is your party."

Her mother grew more cheerful at the telephone, and Anne rewarded herself with a wise little smile as she heard the conversation in the entry.

"Not a bit of trouble. Yes, Anne, and I thought it would be nice, this bein' a holiday so, you know, an'

seein' it 's been a long time since you got up here to call on us.''

''All right, bring her right along. We 'll be glad to have her.''

''Yes, and I hope the road is good up Carter's Hill. Seems as if it orter be, with two hired men there and land knows how many horses! All right, good-by.''

Anne fled up-stairs before the next call and got her candles, also some little festive table mats that she had brought from Maryland, and some red favors luckily left over from a college party. Already she was beginning to have ideas. They were worked out in a real holiday spirit of mystery behind the closed dining-room door, while Mrs. Carew dressed up-stairs. Only occasionally Anne would open the door to call out some such questions as, ''May I use the fruit cake that 's all done up in a cloth, Mother?'' or, ''Do you care if we have some of that logan-berry jam?''

Mrs. Carew had quite entered into the excitement of the party by the time she viewed herself in the glass, minus the neuralgic head bandage and plus her most becoming, although second-best, dress. The sitting-room looked truly festive in the soft red light from Anne's candles, and the dining-room, with its closed door, piqued Mrs. Carew's curiosity till she could hardly greet her first guest.

Belinda Meekins arrived unexpectedly early, having been accommodated by a ride with Cy Whittredge, the grocer, thus saving her the bother of harnessing.

''I didn't tell Cy I was asked to come,'' she whispered cannily as she removed her bonnet. ''I thought maybe you hadn't asked Miry.''

''Yes, I did, and she ain't well,'' Mrs. Carew put in

triumphantly. "I asked everybody whose roads are broken out and who is in the sewin' circle. You know there ain't no sense in askin' people like Mis' Hawkins. She 's so far away she could n't get here anyhow, and this was all done on the spur of the minute, as you might say."

"Well, I do think it 's wonderful to do things that way," Belinda sighed as she seated herself by the fire and turned her skirt back. "My niece that lives in the city, she 'll have people in 'most any time, and I don't know that she does a thing different. They always have clean towels hangin' up and extry portions for the table."

Belinda Meekins was a flat-featured, round-faced woman whose spectacles were generally worn on her forehead and whose thin brown hair was carefully frizzled in front and drawn into a neat, tight little coil in back. Belinda was considered a woman of possibilities, despite her meekness, for nothing escaped her notice, and her memory for detail was almost miraculous. It was one of her boasts that she had not missed a wedding or a funeral hack that had passed her house in the last twenty years. And she would have made any sacrifice rather than lose her telephone, a convenience that she had been one of the first in Bantam Hill to possess.

As she talked to the three women who were "laying off their wraps" in the hall, Anne watched Belinda holding forth in the sitting-room. To Anne she was a source of never-failing interest. At present Belinda's blue eyes, keen despite their apparent mildness, were taking in the guest whom Mrs. Salt had asked to bring.

"Mis' Brant, my husband's sister," Mrs. Salt said, introducing her companion.

Belinda dropped her spectacles upon her nose and held forth a plump hand.

"Well, now, I am surprised. I went to school with Jo Salt for years, and I never knew he had a sister."

Mrs. Brant flushed.

"I was adopted," she explained. She was a fair, pretty little woman with shallow eyes and an easy smile. Just at present she was embarrassed, though her smile persisted.

"That so?" Belinda's tone was interested. "Did you ever live in Hammerton when we went over to school there?"

Mrs. Salt came to the rescue.

"Carrie, she 's younger than us. Joe's mother took her after they moved out to Schenectady."

"I always did think it was a great triumph for Bantam Hill when the Salts turned their back upon New York State and came here again." It was Miss Susan Little, the remaining member of the company, who spoke. Miss Susan Little, sharp-eyed and soft-voiced, was the village dressmaker, who courted the favor of all and who lately commanded more or less respect, owing to a recent trip to New York.

Mrs. Salt bridled.

"There 's them that say Jo came back here to see if I was still workin' in Hammerton, but there ain't a mite of truth in it. Jo would n't have been so silly."

"I never heard that," Belinda said innocently. "I thought Jo used to go with Sary Byers when he first come back."

"I think he did, a little," Mrs. Salt conceded carelessly. "But Sary was an extravagant thing, and Jo was lookin' for somebody who could help him prosper."

"And he certainly found somebody," assented Miss Susan Little, so warmly that Mrs. Salt looked less pleased than Miss Little had expected.

Belinda artfully changed the subject.

"Do you find much trouble collectin' bills, Susan?" she asked.

Miss Little pursed her lips and smoothed down her skirt.

"Those that I know are good friends of mine I can always trust," she said, with so much diplomacy that Anne, who was just then kneeling to tend the fire, stifled a smile as she pushed the great backlog into position.

Mrs. Carew, who had been usually silent, now electrified the company:

"Mis' Yell has a baby. They call him by her maiden name, 'Louder,' " she said.

Anne, who had heard this before, too, withdrew quietly to finish a letter to Lucille. But from time to time the conversation reached her, and she found herself unable to write, for listening.

"Mother is having a few friends in to-day," she wrote at the top of the second page. Then she had visions of what that would mean to Lucille and her brother. She well remembered the afternoon teas at which she and Lucille had poured, the soft voices, the pretty dresses, the pleasant little remarks about the weather, the decorations, the lecture of the night before, the prima donna who was to sing the following week. They had been "good alike at grave and gay," but Anne wondered shrewdly as she wrote if they had been any more sincere than the bright-eyed, energetic New England ladies who were chatting in the room at that moment. "If only they would n't gossip so," she thought desperately

as she heard her mother giving spirited details of the reasons for Mrs. Yell's taking boarders. Yet she was forced to acknowledge that it was seldom malicious gossip. Moreover what else was there for them to discuss? They saw only each other and their own families. Anne herself was beginning to sense the deadly monotony of life upon the farm, and she had pleasures of which they knew nothing. Poor Belinda could not even read poetry or go for a walk when life took on a darker tinge than usual. The letter to Lucille did not progress very fast, for Anne was thinking.

"He 's a professor," Mrs. Carew was announcing triumphantly. "I asked Cy Whittredge."

"Well, it 's queer Cy did n't tell me anything about it when I rode down here," Belinda complained, rather injured to find that her hostess was in possession of such a leading card.

Just then they heard Anne's voice behind them. The shadows were already falling on that short winter day, and Anne, as she came forward and stood in front of the fire, seemed to gather all the brightness of the room so that, without knowing why, they leaned forward with a little thrill of anticipation. Anne's hair looked more golden than usual as the firelight played upon it, and her eyes had grown dark and starry.

Miss Susan Little knew the value of the red dress, too, but there was no one there who did not enjoy the sight of Anne even though they could not have told why.

"It 's too early for refreshments yet," Anne was saying, "and I was wondering if you would like to have me recite to you."

There was a little flutter and a murmur of assent, broken by Mrs. Carew who remarked in surprise:

"Do you think you can remember any of those old things, Anne?"

"I have some new ones," Anne answered her, smiling, and without affectation she began at once. She had made up her mind to try them first with something that would be short and yet would appeal to them. In a moment the silence was broken by a childish voice that they knew was Anne's and yet seemed to them marvelously changed.

" 'Las' night I had a noffle dream,' "

Belinda laughed aloud, Anne's tone was so unmistakably scared, and the involuntary tribute gave Anne courage to do her best. She knew she was holding her audience, and she enjoyed watching them as much as she had ever enjoyed watching those far different audiences at college or at Genevieve's.

When the last line was finished, when the mock terror had faded from the speaker's face, and the childish voice had ceased, Mrs. Brant started to applaud, and the others joined in enthusiastically. Anne sat down, laughing a little at their ejaculations, but pleased, nevertheless, and more pleased perhaps by the pride upon Mrs. Carew's face than anything else.

They wanted her to "do it again," and she gave them "The Highwayman" by Noyes, putting more of herself into the dramatic story than she had ever put in before. The close of the poem left them silent, impressed as much by the tragedy as by Anne's ability to render it. Mrs. Salt spoke first.

"I think that 's the most wonderful thing I ever heard. There was a ventriloquist up town last year and he did some fine voice changing, but this here is different. It 's real!"

"But highwaymen and old inns and things aren't real," objected Mrs. Brant. "It 's just Anne that makes them so."

Anne laughed, and rising from the low chair where she had seated herself after her reading, she walked over to the dining-room.

"I 'm almost ready for you in here," she said. "When I ring the bell, Mother, don't you want to bring them in?"

Mrs. Carew assented, and when the little bell tinkled, she proudly led the way to the dining-room where there was as much of a surprise for her as for the rest.

Red candles with black and red shades stood at the four corners of the table. A centerpiece of artificial Poinsettias rose in the middle of the white cloth, and streamers of red from the flowers to the edge of the table completed Anne's holiday color scheme. At each place she had laid Washington's-birthday favors, not quite new in two cases, but Anne and her mother did not mind, and no one else suspected. The little feast was as simple as the decorations, but Anne was rewarded for any trouble that it might have been when she heard the exclamations from the guests. They found their places, like girls, in a flutter of excitement, and the little buzz of questions in regard to how Anne did this or that made Mrs. Carew swell with pride. Anne's mousse, chilled in a hurry in the snow bank by the side steps, called forth all of Belinda's remaining adjectives, and Mrs. Salt ceased to estimate the probable cost of the party when she saw the fruit cake that Mrs. Carew had contributed to the occasion.

When the last guest had gone and the red candles had

been extinguished lest they spoil the table-cloth, Mrs. Carew turned to Anne.

"That was the best time we 've all had for a long spell, Anne. But I can tell you, I 've made a lot of enemies."

"Enemies?" echoed Anne.

"Yes." Mrs. Carew nodded emphatically.

"Why, how?"

"Everybody who was n't asked."

"Oh, that 's easy," laughed Anne. "We 'll do it again."

Mrs. Carew sighed.

"Well, it 's been a fine holiday, Anne. I must say you recited real well."

"I 'm glad you liked it, Mother," Anne said as she folded up the little streamers and put the Poinsettias away in their box.

"What do you suppose Mildred did to-day?"

"I don't know, but she 'll be surprised to hear about this. Why, I don't know when I 've had a party, Anne."

"Then we 'll have them often," Anne said recklessly. She was glowing under her mother's approbation.

"I wish Myrtle could have been here," Mrs. Carew added thoughtfully, "I hate to have her so far away."

"I suppose she has to be where Edward's work is." Anne tried to make her tone cheerful, but there was a heaviness about it that struck her mother's ear.

"Sometimes I think you 'd have made about as good a wife for Edward as Myrtle is," Mrs. Carew said dispassionately.

"Oh, no!" Anne's tone was gay. "You know man

supposes and woman proposes. Edward did n't really want me.''

''No, I imagine he did n't,'' agreed her mother, reasonably. ''But I had quite a time making out how things were going.''

''So did I,'' Anne answered lightly, and went out to shake the table-cloth.

CHAPTER XV

IT was dusk nearly two weeks later and Anne was driving slowly down the country road to meet the evening train upon which Mildred was due to arrive from Harriet's.

A light, dry snow still covered the barren fields, and the road was hard and rough with deeply frozen ruts. Anne, warmly muffled in her thick coat with its upstanding collar, was nevertheless aware of the chill in the air, and as the last bit of crimson in the west was swallowed up by dull gray clouds, the keen wind seemed to grow keener with the swiftly striding darkness.

Anne was just beginning to acknowledge to herself, now that Mildred was coming back, how lonely life had been without her. The Washington's-birthday party could not be repeated every day even if Anne had had the courage, and many of the days had passed drearily enough. Myrtle's weekly letter had been full of complaints. On the receipt of the carelessly scrawled pages Mrs. Carew had seemed to lose what little cheerfulness Anne had made for her, and Mildred, the sunshine of the house, had not been there to help Anne out. The evenings had dragged unaccountably, despite readings and an occasional caller, and Anne had felt that she was a dire failure when night after night her mother had sat gloomily over the fire for an hour or two, and then sighed her way out of the cheerless living-room and trudged slowly up to bed.

Anne drew Nellie up before the bare, unlovely station,

and waited, shivering in the gloom, till far down the level track she caught the gleam of the engine's headlight. Only a murky kerosene lamp brightened the ugly shanty that sprawled at one end of the platform, and as the train came swiftly on, it seemed as if it must dislodge the crazy building and push it madly along in front of its own great bulk. But the wheels began to grind and creak; there was a jarring and rattling repeated from car to car, and the long train came to a reluctant stop. From the bright vestibule of one car stepped a brown-clad, smiling girl, with unruly hair curling from under her plain traveling hat. She was such a pleasant figure to look upon that it was no wonder the young brakeman gratuitously carried her suitcase to the platform before he swung recklessly on the moving train. Anne smiled at the little comedy, then went to meet the new arrival. Mildred was coming swiftly toward her, stepping as blithely as if she were not struggling with an overwhelmingly heavy suitcase.

"Trunk to the left, bend," she said breathlessly as she came up to Anne. "Wait a minute till I get some breath to heave her up."

"I 'll do it," Anne cried. "Whoa, Nellie. This suitcase is altogether too heavy for you, my child."

Mildred laughed mischievously as she kissed Anne.

"Stop pitying Nellie! She can carry it if I can." Then still chuckling at the absurdity that she had attributed to Anne, she climbed gaily into the shabby "democrat," and picked up the reins with a flourish.

"Back to my own modest four cylinder!" she exclaimed. "Anne, I 've had the most wonderful time!"

"I 'm so glad." Anne's tone had an elderly quality in it beside Mildred's joyousness. "So many things

come out wrong, and we all tried so hard to have you go that it 's a kind of reward to have you come home happy."

Mildred's face clouded.

"Goodness, I 'd almost forgotten that it was hard to go. I 've lived in such luxury ever since I got there that I shall probably be feeling all over the sitting-room wall for bells to ring this evening."

"Well, don't feel too hard, for the wall-paper is all peeled off."

"Oh, Anne, shut up. I don't want to see the old place ever again."

"Why, Mildred Carew!"

Mildred remained rebelliously silent. Then all at once she gave a rapturous little sigh.

"Yes, I can stand anything. I 'm so happy that I don't believe anything will ever trouble me again."

Anne recognized a mysterious quality in the girl's voice, and was puzzled by it. It was triumphant, yet vastly wistful.

"Tell me all about what you did," Anne suggested gently, afraid to probe into this new experience that had come to Mildred. Perhaps, Anne told herself, it was merely her own imagination that had read too much into the simple words. Surely Mildred was too sensible to be whirled off her feet by a house-party affair. Flirtations there probably were; Anne had feared that; she had hardly confessed how much she feared it; yet she had hoped that Mildred's own good sense and puritan conscience would prove sufficient armor.

Mildred was obediently telling her adventures when Anne's mind came back to the question that she had asked.

"We skated, as you said we would. I met a man there who was a wonderful skater. His name is Chippendale, but they call him Chips for short. His last name is Hall. His mother came from Boston and they must be very nice people, because Chips is always referring to what 'our family' have been accustomed to do."

"I have the young man located," returned Anne, dryly. "And you call him 'Chips'?"

"Yes, and he taught me how to really skate as I never did before."

"I consider you an excellent skater," Anne put in, feeling all at once on the defensive, although she could hardly tell why.

"Oh, no! I romped. Chips thought that hockey had probably spoiled my glide. We had wonderful music," she went on so enthusiastically that she did not hear Anne's little grunt of disgust. "And then we had some hot things to eat in a little decorated tent on the shore, and we never stopped skating till after twelve."

"And nobody there to warn you not to catch cold?" laughed the other.

"Not a soul! The chaperon was very young! That was half the fun. Harriet's mother never says a word to her about not doing things. She could n't keep track of Harriet, anyway. She 's always going off in some good-looking automobile or coming back to dress and go off again. She said that the house was ours while we stayed, and that she had n't planned a thing for herself there, not a single evening. Imagine being able to keep our house free from engagements for two weeks. It would be a horrible undertaking, would n't it, Anne?"

"Don't get sarcastic, honey. We may have been very dissipated while you were gone."

"Anne, now I 've been out and seen the world,"—Anne smiled into the darkness,—"I don't see how you stand it here. You are a wonder. I 'm just hoping and praying you 'll make loads of money some day, and then you and I can live in New York and really live."

"We can really *live* here," Anne answered, to her own surprise.

But Mildred was beginning her recital again.

"Anne, the dance was the loveliest thing you ever saw, colored lights and flowers and wonderful favors and such marvelous things to eat that I hated to put them out of sight. Why, I ate an orchid that Belinda Meekins would have kept on her parlor table all the days of her life. It was half candy and half cream. When I think of going back to fried eggs and left-over baked beans, it seems as if I just could n't."

Anne was silent. She knew only too well how hard it was for Mildred to come home.

"When did you dance?" she asked at last.

"Friday, after we got there. They met me at the station with a big car, and everybody that could, piled in to come down for us. I met a nice girl from the Heights who asked all about Myrtle."

"What did you tell her?" was Anne's quick question.

Mildred's tone was shrewd.

"I said she had married a rising young doctor and was living in New York."

"New York State," corrected Anne.

"All right," answered Mildred, imperturbably. "I tell you I kept up the reputation of the family, Anne."

"Thank you. What else did you do for amusement?"

"Oh, we ate, ate lots of everything all the time. And yet do you know I kept wondering where the food went

that we did n't eat. There must have been such a huge amount of it that they did n't think worth putting back on the table again. And we were always having tea in the afternoon, or what Harriet called a 'snack' after a ride, or a midnight lunch after skating, and then regular meals. My! were n't they formal! I was n't at all sure what to do at first. I think you might have told me a little bit, Anne."

"I suppose I might, but I never can bear the idea of a rehearsal of that sort of thing. I know we 're poor, but somehow that makes us more than poor; it reminds me of the Birds getting ready for the Christmas dinner."

"I see," Mildred said thoughtfully. Then she gave a little hop on the seat and came nearer to Anne. "Put on a lot of knives and forks and spoons and things some meals when we are all alone, and then I can adapt myself to them in my natural environment."

"You can *what?*" asked Anne, turning to stare at the round face under the pretty hat.

"That 's what Chips was always talking about. He said environment was not everything, but it was a great deal."

"Was he criticizing yours?" Anne's tone was hostile.

"Oh, my, no! He did n't know I came from Bantam Hill till just as we were leaving."

"Then he has your address now?"

"Yes." Mildred drew a little farther away from Anne, and then said tactfully, "Will you set the table that way some night, Anne? Just for fun?"

"Can't you see mother's face?" Anne tried not to smile at the thought.

"Never mind, Mother should learn, too. Father always knew about things, did n't he?"

Anne did not answer for a moment. It was seldom that Mildred spoke of the father who had died when Anne was a little girl, the father who loved books and pictures and the hills at twilight and the dawn on Lost Mountain and all things beautiful that his wife had no time to look at. Anne knew that she would never have wanted to go to college if it had not been for Adam Carew.

"Yes, father knew about those things," she said, "but he knew about other things lots more important, dear. Don't let Chips mislead you."

"Oh, Chips does n't put too much emphasis on outward appearances. He says it is his boast that he can recognize inner worth. Is n't it fine that I should have met somebody like that in the midst of all those silly college fellows, and that he should have enjoyed talking to me?"

"Is n't 'Chips,' as you call him, in college?"

"No; he left in the middle of his course. He lives in New York a good deal, helping his father with that branch of the business. Chips thinks most colleges are frightfully narrow."

"Were your clothes all right?" Anne asked, wisely avoiding the subject of the prejudices of young Mr. Chippendale Hall.

"I guess so. I was a little worried at first, for fear the green was too dark and not low enough. All the girls were putting on—well, I don't know what they *were* putting on. You and Myrtle could have told, but I 've never noticed clothes much before. It looked like clouds of chiffon all different colors. That was about

all. I don't see why they don't freeze to death, Anne."

"It 's all in custom," Anne answered tolerantly, and laughed as she added a minute later, "Mrs. Salt thinks you and I should freeze because we don't wear flannel petticoats."

"Well, if Mrs. Salt could see those girls she would lie right down and die."

"Not until she had been up to tell Mrs. Whittredge and Belinda about it."

They both laughed. Then Anne's face clouded.

"I hope you saw a good deal of Harriet, when she was so nice as to ask you to come."

"Indeed I did. I roomed with her. Was n't that scrumptious? Her brother Cyrus was there too, and he certainly is fun, except when he takes off Chips. Then I think he goes too far."

"Were n't there any other boys besides Chips there that you liked?"

"Chips is n't a boy. Yes; there were several prep boys there, friends of Harriet's and Cy's."

"I 'm afraid school will seem stupid after this."

Mildred hesitated, then she said seriously:

"No, I don't think it will. You see it 's got to be gone through with, and as long as it 's my last year, I 'm bound to make the best of it."

"You must, or you can't go to training-school."

"Oh, Anne, let 's not worry about that. There 's plenty of time."

Anne looked startled, but she did not speak. She was thinking hard indeed in the darkness, however. Finally she turned to the little sister at her side and bent her head till she brushed Mildred's cold cheek gently with her lips.

"I 'm so glad you could go, dear. You 've had a wonderful time, have n't you?"

Mildred responded instantly, as she always did to affection.

"Indeed I have," she answered, and her voice was fervent. Then she paused. Anne did not speak, but she waited, leaning a little nearer to the girl at her side, trying to show her without words how close was the bond between them.

They were approaching the farm, where Mrs. Carew, with her numberless questions and rather worldly comments, would break the spell that was on Mildred before Anne could hear the truth.

"You are glad to come home, are n't you, dear, just a little bit glad to see us all?"

"Of course I wanted to see you, Anne."

Anne straightened a little and pulled the reins sharply as she guided Nellie into the yard. But Mildred was a child of surprises, and Anne was to find out the thing she sought, after all. Just as the two climbed down from the high seat, Mildred flung out an impulsive hand toward Anne. In the purple gloom of the carriage house, she put her lips to Anne's ear, as if even Nellie could not be trusted.

"I 'm so glad I met Chips," she whispered, "because after you 've seen him and I 've graduated and everything, I 'm going to fall in love with him."

Nellie gave a scornful whinny and stamped one foot with unmistakable emphasis.

CHAPTER XVI

"SEEMS to me that 's an awful long letter, Anne." Mrs. Carew changed her position from the rocker by the fireplace to the stuffed arm-chair at the window, and scanned the road that curved by the house on its way to the Center. After a minute she said: "Mis' Simpkins has just drove by. She must be goin' to the sewin' circle."

"Where is it to-day?" Anne asked, without looking up.

"Up to Belinda Meekins's."

Anne turned a fresh sheet and then smiled brightly over at her mother.

"Want to go, Mother?"

"Well," hesitated Mrs. Carew, indeterminately. When brought to the point she really did not know whether she wanted to go or not.

Anne capped her fountain-pen without further words.

"I 'll be ready in ten minutes. John will need longer than that to harness Nellie, and we 'll need longer still to find John. He has an instinct for being absent when wanted."

"But I did n't really know whether I wanted to go or not," put in Mrs. Carew, in alarm.

Anne stood still, where she had risen, looking at her mother with an amused little smile.

"Well, do you?"

Certainly Anne was provoking to expect a decision in

a moment, so to speak. Mrs. Carew did not know yet whether she really wanted to make the effort to get ready or what dress she would wear if she did go. And still Anne insisted upon waiting, as if she could think when she was looked at in that fashion!

"I 've got to change my dress as well as you," she began at last.

"All right," assented Anne, good-naturedly. "Suppose we begin?"

"But I don't have any idea what I 'm goin' to wear."

"Why not the black mohair?" The suggestion was made as judicially as if there were dozens of gowns to choose from, whereas Anne knew from long experience that this was an occasion for "third best."

"I guess I will." Mrs. Carew began to fold the shawl she was knitting for Myrtle. She had intended it for a Christmas present, but, like most of her "pick-up work," it was unfinished. Midway in folding the shawl she ventured, "I s'pose Nellie ain't too tired?"

"Mother, do you really want to go?" Anne laughed. "Because you know that horse is good for twenty miles long after the rest of us have given out."

"Why, yes, if you want to, I 'll go."

"All right." Anne had learned to ignore the point of view with which Mrs. Carew generally ended discussions. "I want to. We 'll leave a note for Mildred when she comes from school and go out and have a breath of fresh air and neighborhood sociability. Mildred won't mind. John brought home a letter from the young Bostonian, and she will be too much excited to miss us."

"I expect it 's a good thing I let Mildred go to that house-party," Mrs. Carew said complacently as she put up her glasses and straightened a chair or two.

"I 'm glad to hold you responsible, then, Mother," Anne said, smiling. "For we may not like him." She did not pretend to misunderstand what her mother meant.

"Oh, I 'm sure I don't want to be held responsible for anything. I only said I was glad I let her go."

Anne shut her portfolio with a snap. It was absurd to be put out with her mother for such innocent little attempts to make herself clear, but sometimes it was just the pettiness of a conversation like this one that tried Anne more than the day's work. She began to have the feeling that her mother and she could talk and talk and never by any chance reach a conclusion in regard to anything. Mrs. Carew seemed continually on the defensive, no matter what was said. Anne knew that it was foolish to be annoyed by little things that were quite unintentional, but she found herself arguing with her mother sometimes until she ran up-stairs, disgusted with herself and the world. And her letters to Lucille or Genevieve were her despair. To others whom she knew less well she could write with ease of the little things that happened in town, of clever things that Mildred said, or of something she herself had done. In fact, she had learned to make so much out of a little that one of the Schull College girls wrote that she envied her the life at home, where she had no lectures to prepare as she used to and where there were so many pleasant things to do. Anne had read the letter to Mildred with a whimsical smile. "I 've had to make the same event do duty in more than one letter," she had said, and she had marveled a little at the careless acceptance of the same fact in Mildred's answer. "Oh, I know all about it, but you can work it

beautifully when you know how. First you write that you are going somewhere and then in the next letter you have just been and nobody ever knows that it 's the same thing three weeks apart."

"Mildred is a philosopher without trying to be," Anne had thereupon decided. And she had tried to make her letters sound as bright and contented as she pretended to feel. Only lately she had been vaguely troubled by the unexpected success of her efforts.

"Your descriptions of the people there are delicious," Genevieve had written. "I can see Belinda Meekins spending the day in Hammerton and fully prepared to spend the night if asked. Who but Belinda would have dreamed of wearing a nightgown under her dress?" And again she had written: "You have n't told me lately about the man with the temper. Has he done anything comparable to his last stunt? When I read my mother your description of how he set the pail of potato parings on his wife's head I thought we should both have hysterics." Another time she wrote: "I can still see you do your imitations of Aunt Lindy Pearson telling lies. Bynner said the way you swallowed between sentences was worth the price of admission." Anne had smiled over the letters, but had pondered long afterward upon the contents. Had she been caricaturing her friends without intending to? She found herself taking a different view of things since the little holiday party when they had thanked her so gratefully for a pleasure that seemed trifling. And yet what a story she could write about Bantam Hill if only she knew how to go about it!

Anne was still thinking of these things when she

heard her mother rustling down the hall in the third-best dress. She had the inevitable cameo fastened in the prim lace at her throat.

"Am I all right?" she said.

"Turn around," said Anne, critically, knowing the very words and tone that would give the most complete satisfaction. "Yes," she decided after a solemn moment during which Mrs. Carew's expression was anxiously interrogative. "You are quite all right." Her mother now turned her attention upon Anne.

"You are n't goin' to wear that, are you?"

"Why not, Mother?"

"Well, Miss Susan Little will be there, and I don't think you look dressed up enough in that corduroy."

"Oh, Mother dear, never mind. Most of my things are getting past wearing anyway. When I sell a story I 'll go to sewing circle with you, wearing claret velvet with one great topaz my sole adornment."

"No, I don't mean that, I only meant—"

"Mother, we really have to start." Anne drew on her gloves with such finality that her mother went downstairs at once, but Anne knew that she was hurt.

The sewing circle was well started before Anne and her mother arrived. Belinda Meekins's parlor was full. There was Mrs. Hoskins in the same purple suit that Anne remembered seeing her wear before Anne herself went to college; yet every one knew that Mrs. Hoskins kept many thousand dollars in an old tin tea-kettle somewhere in her cellar. There was Mrs. Whittredge, the wife of Cy, who kept the general store. Mrs. Whittredge had been the village schoolmistress for many years, and Cy was wont to testify that she was as fine a disciplinariness as ever stepped. Belinda said once that she

thought Cy ought to know. There was Aunt Lindy Pearson, who could never hear a story without matching it to a better. The village still recounted the tale she told to the summer boarder who had innocently admired Myrtle Carew's golden-brown eyebrows and heavily fringed eyes. "When I was young," Lindy had said, "my eyebrows were so long that I could tuck them behind my ears." As Anne looked about there was not a women present who was not interesting "copy." And they fully appreciated each other. Somehow Anne felt that she could find excuse in that for anything that she might write about them if she ever did write. The conversation halted for a moment to greet the new-comers and then went merrily on.

"And he said to the minister himself when he was through speakin' at the funeral and just as they was shuttin' the casket, 'Mr. Spear,' sez he, lookin' at the baby there in the coffin, 'Mr. Spear, I loved him that well I could wish him stuffed.' If that wa'n't the worst remark you ever heard, then I want to know."

Anne broke the silence with a little gasp.

"Who said that?" she cried.

"That half-educated blacksmith down 't other end of town. Wa'n't that awful, Anne?"

"Yes, but I think he just loved that baby so much that he could n't find any other words to tell it in. If he is always so primitive he must be interesting."

"Anne can generally find something good about people," Mrs. Hoskins said with unwonted gentleness.

"Yes, I 've brought her up that way," Mrs. Carew put in as she clicked her knitting-needles a little more emphatically. Mrs. Hoskins had been reported to her once as saying that Myrtle Carew would have been a

real pretty girl if she had n't caught her mother's disposition.

"Speakin' of interestin' people," said Belinda peaceably, "that tourist boardin' up at Yell's is certainly interestin'."

"He has an automobile, but he never seems to get along with it very well," interposed Mrs. Brant, delighted with a topic in which she could join. "He was three hours getting up Carter's Hill the other day."

"That car must cost him something," Mrs. Salt added. "He is always in Hammerton having it fixed."

"Cy says he acts like a man with plenty of money, but he 's sort of an independent, cool kind of person. Cy asked him if he was calculatin' to stay all spring, and he just looked Cy over and said he never lived more than a day ahead." This last contribution was from Mrs. Whittredge.

"And they say he don't get much mail except lots of government stuff."

"He wears silk shirts. Mrs. Yell told me so over the telephone," Belinda added breathlessly.

"And his glasses are those heavy kind of rimmed ones like Cora Marston's husband wears, the one that teaches in Columbia, New York."

"He 's real good-looking with them off. I see him in the store one day."

Anne put down her work and laughed aloud.

"Belinda, wave a fairy wand and bring him near enough for me to see."

Just at that moment Miss Little, who was sitting by the window, gave an audible gasp. Then she announced in a voice hushed with excitement:

"He 's comin' up the walk now."

There was a general moving of chairs and craning of necks, but Anne scorned to turn that way. Belinda rose to admit the unexpected caller, leaving the sitting-room door obligingly ajar.

"I am looking for the house where Mrs. Meekins lives," a low, not unpleasant, voice began. But Belinda never got the chance to tell him who she was, for Anne Carew, quite oblivious to the amazement of the entire sewing circle, had dropped her work into her chair and disappeared.

"Why, Professor Bernays," they heard her say in glad greeting.

"Well, well, Miss Carew, I began to think you had no further use for me when you paid no attention to my letter."

Very few heard Anne's answer, for they were looking at each other, and somebody repeated, "His letter?" so incredulously that Mrs. Carew dropped a whole row of stitches.

Belinda came back into the room, her mild, round face puckered with excitement, her sewing dragging heedlessly from one hand.

"She knows him," she announced unnecessarily. Everybody looked at Mrs. Carew, but that lady only bent over her work and continued to pick up stitches assiduously, although her lips worked with excitement. Nobody knew how hard she was trying to think who the man might be, for when the knowledge came to her she explained it all with careful precision.

"Fifty-nine, sixty." Mrs. Carew finished counting and looked up. "He is the brother of one of Anne's Maryland friends."

Out in the hall Anne heard this and smiled at Dr.

Bernays with charming frankness. He was looking very well, unusually browned by exposure to sun and wind, and somehow, less lean and stern than when she had trembled before him in faculty discussions.

"You have electrified the sewing circle," she said.

He frowned a little, just the hint of vertical shadowing between the straight heavy brows, which always indicated that he was impatient or embarrassed.

"I have a horror of such gatherings," he said. She laughed up at him, remembering how he used to flee from the house when Lucille entertained the girls from the college, but she reached behind her and closed the door into the sitting-room, although she knew that it would be a long time before Bantam Hill forgave her for that.

"What in the world brings you up here in my part of the country?"

He looked down at her gravely, and if his eyes took in the fact that she had grown prettier since he saw her last in Maryland, he had no art to tell her even indirectly how pleasant it was to see her again.

"I am making a geological survey of the State," he said.

"You are?" Her tone was rather blank. "I did n't realize that we ever afforded such a luxury."

"It is an economic necessity, Miss Carew," he explained gravely. "It encourages the farmers once they are told exactly what can be done with their soil, and invariably tends to make the output of the State much greater."

"How does it feel to be doing work of this kind instead of teaching?" As Anne asked the question, she tried

not to let him see that her attention was divided between his answer and the desire to take him somewhere else to talk, since she could not dismiss him.

"It seems good." His answer was heartily positive. "I believe if I had had to spend another year talking three hours a day to those scatter-brained girls I should have been a helpless idiot."

Anne laughed. It was so natural to hear him abuse his classes as of old.

"Come into the parlor," she said, "and tell me about Lucille and President Thompson and everybody."

She opened the door into the sacred best parlor, where Belinda had enshrined the Lares and Penates of the Meekins family. Straight ahead, out of the dimness, peered the crayon likeness of tight-lipped old Uncle Bija Meekins, inappropriately decorated by two large doves, which had formerly ornamented the funeral wreath of the old gentleman's wife. The quiet room, with its drawn shades and faint smell of haircloth and pressed flowers, did not appeal to Professor Bernays. He stood in the doorway, with a distinctly hostile expression of countenance, and refused to be seated or even to go on with the conversation.

"I cannot stay any longer," he explained formally. "I merely came to inquire about a boarding-place. I was sent to the Yells's, but it was to be only temporary, as I expected to hear from you of a place that you would recommend. I am rather an annoying and irregular boarder. Somebody suggested Mrs. Meekins, but I really do not think—" he paused politely and looked around and then back at Anne.

"No, I don't think so either," she said, and they both

smiled. With that little unspoken knowledge of sympathy between them Anne felt more confidence in his presence.

"Come down to supper with us to-night," she said impulsively, "and we can talk then about your work and just what kind of place you need. If it must be quite central, perhaps my mother could suggest a place. I should like to have you meet her and my little sister, too."

He did not remind her that he disliked to meet people, and she pretended that she had forgotten the fact. He seemed really rather grateful for the invitation, and took it as a signal to close the interview.

"I should be pleased to come," he said, with one of his rare smiles. "I am glad your mother is so much better. Lucille tells me she is quite well."

Anne smiled to herself as she rose, for she could not imagine Dr. Bernays inquiring about anybody's health.

"She is quite well now, and will be very glad to meet you. Do you know how to get to the house?"

"No; I did not tell any one that I knew you when I received no answer to my letter."

Anne knitted her brows over the mysterious letter.

"I cannot think where it went," she said. Then she smiled at him with a little of her old daring. "Were you afraid that if I should be gone you would be forced to meet a strange family?"

"No. I was n't precisely afraid," he answered seriously, "but meeting a great many people hardly ever serves any special purpose."

"That sounds exactly like you," she said. "Lucille has n't converted you yet, has she?"

As he did not answer, she hurried on.

"You will have to be told how to reach our house then, for we don't want you lost on the way."

They were in the little corridor again when Anne directed him to the farm, and she saw that he was aware of the absolute silence in the next room. She did not attempt to keep him any longer, merely set the time for supper, hoping fervently that Mildred had not invited any girls home with her for the evening.

His last speech to her was only a grave acknowledgment of her explanation of the road, and then he went quickly down the front path, drawing his hat over his eyes and pretending, Anne knew, that he did not feel the glances that were directed at him from behind the discreetly drawn draperies.

"Well, that 's what I call an interesting lookin' man," Mrs. Hoskins said approvingly when Anne came in. Anne's cheeks were a little flushed by the unusual circumstances of the afternoon and the prospect of a still more unusual evening. She was delighted, too, at the chance of hearing so directly from the old friends in that life that she tried so hard not to miss. She could not quite realize, even now, that Dr. Bernays was actually in Bantam Hill. And where did the letter go which he said he had written her? She wondered what he would say in a letter.

As she entered the room again and heard Mrs. Hoskins's leading remark, she knew that she would run a gauntlet of good-natured questioning, and she suddenly felt equal to anything that they might say. Anne was always at her best when she was nervously excited and obliged to think quickly.

"My, ain't your cheeks pink," Mrs. Whittredge began, when no one answered Mrs. Hoskins.

"Well, no wonder! Why, I never was so surprised as to see Dr. Bernays walk in."

"Your mother says you knew him in Maryland," Mrs. Salt put in, as she threaded a needle upside down. She was trembling with the excitement of a hitherto unguessed romance.

"Yes, indeed, we all knew him. He is quite the most brilliant lecturer that the college ever had, and we could never have kept him so long except that his health has not been good until lately."

"What in the world is he doin' up here, Anne?" It was Mrs. Carew who spoke.

"Making a geological survey of the State," Anne answered, with a twinkle.

Mrs. Whittredge considered that this remark gave her an opportunity to remind the company that she was a woman of learning.

"That 's something I have always told Cy should be done."

"Yes," assented Anne. "Dr. Bernays says it is an economic necessity, but I think, Mother, it 's quite as necessary that we go home very soon, for I have invited him to supper."

"Well, I 'm sure I 'm glad you did." Mrs. Carew rose to the occasion magnificently. "I always do like company. That 's one reason I miss Myrtle so," she added to Belinda. "Myrtle was for ever havin' people in, although,"—here she smiled archly,—"it was generally the same person a good many times."

"How is Myrtle?" somebody inquired with interest as Mrs. Carew put away her knitting and prepared to go.

Anne saw Belinda making her way into the dining-room and ran after her.

"Not a bite can we eat," she said, laughing, "and please, Belinda, don't get your refreshments out early just for us."

"Well, I want as your mother should taste my ginger cookies made by Lindy Pearson's rule. And you must have a piece of cake, too. Here, just taste of this." As Belinda laid out some spicy cookies upon a plate already waiting on the red-covered dining table, she bent closer to Anne.

"What 's this, some one was sayin' about Myrtle?"

Anne looked back at her gravely.

"Myrtle is very well and happy. We just had a letter the other day."

"No specially good news comin' later?" Belinda mutely pressed another cooky upon Anne as she asked her question.

Anne refused the delicacy, but nodded at the question.

"Yes, but I did n't know whether mother was telling you or not. No, thank you, Belinda, not another one."

"Well, now, ain't you pleased? I do like to see a pretty girl like Myrtle settle down and have a home and family. I expect she 's happy as the day is long. And Edward is a fine man as ever was."

"Yes, indeed he is." Anne's voice was quite cordial in its assent, but Belinda Meekins put the cooky plate down and laid a hand on the girl's arm.

"We want to see you settled next, my dear," she said.

"I am quite settled now," Anne laughed back as she prepared to go.

"Just wait till your mother has one of these cookies," Belinda urged. And then with a return to her last subject she added, "You won't stay settled this way long. Not with all that pretty hair, and those eyes of yours. Only don't lose your color doin' housework, the way I did."

"Are you looking for romance in Bantam Hill?" teased Anne, as Belinda led the way with the cake and cookies.

"Why not?" that lady answered sturdily. "I guess a town that can have a jollogical survey can have 'most anything."

"But Dr. Bernays is old," protested Anne.

Belinda stopped walking and turned around.

"Oh, I didn't mean him specially. So he 's single, is he? Well, child, you needn't blush. Nobody has said anything."

"But he 's old," persisted Anne, feeling all at once very guilty about her frank delight in seeing Arthur Bernays again.

"Well, I 'll ask Mis' Yell next time I see her. She 'll know," and Belinda disappeared with her refreshments.

CHAPTER XVII

ANNE felt a strange exhilaration, which she did not try to account for, as she prepared the table for the evening meal on that first night of Professor Bernays' arrival. It was not that she was so keenly glad of his presence in any personal way. His friendliness seemed too remote, too curious a mixture of reserve and bluntness, to arouse in her any lasting feeling of intimacy, but he was a gentleman of culture, a man widely read and traveled, and Anne was hungry for things which, she knew, he could give her. Her interest in him, moreover, seemed much greater now in Bantam Hill than it ever did in the little college world where he had his imitators if not his equals. His queer little mannerisms, his absolutely unprejudiced honesty, his lack of sentiment, and occasionally of humor, all attracted Anne, although she had never known or understood the side of him that called out Lucille's worshipful adoration. She was aware as she moved to and fro between table and pantry that her mother was making disjointed remarks from the sitting-room, relative to the use of the best sauce dishes and Aunt Samantha's centerpiece.

When the guest came in from the barn where he had been fussily caring for his little runabout, he greeted Mrs. Carew with dignity unimpaired by the smooch on his cheek and the impossible condition of his hands.

"I have a suitcase in the back of the car," he ex-

plained without embarrassment, "in case you have decided to let me board with you."

Mrs. Carew looked at Anne rather helplessly, and Anne looked back at her mother and then at Dr. Bernays. Mrs. Carew's face was easy to read.

The idea appealed to her, but she did not dare to appear too eager. What flitting visions of luxuries purchased with the board money, or of envious eyes of neighbors as they appraised this new member of her family Mrs. Carew was just then enjoying!

"You don't mind our being so far from town?" Anne asked, trying to take his sudden request as a matter of course. The idea of his boarding with them had occurred to her during their conversation of their afternoon, but she had expected to talk it over with her mother first.

"My car," he explained, with more of apology than pride in his voice, "is supposed to render me quite independent on that score. I trust," he added dryly, "that what the dealer told me about it will soon come true. I have noticed one fact that he mentioned, which is that I can absolutely depend upon it. The only trouble is that he didn't state at the time just what quality it had that could be depended upon. However, I have drawn my own conclusions."

"Would you have to have breakfast very early?" asked Mrs. Carew suddenly.

He looked a little blank and then said at once:

"Not at all, and I should probably never be here to lunch at noon. I am likely to take the long trips in the morning, then confer with any men that I am obliged to direct, and do my writing in the afternoon."

"Well, I 'm sure if Anne is willing, we 'd be glad to

have you come." Mrs. Carew proceeded to plump up the cushions on the couch to a hospitable degree of softness.

"Anne, won't it be exciting to have a boarder?" Mildred cried in delight as Anne walked in upon her inspecting the new-comer through a discreet crack in the door.

"I 'd like to have you come and meet Lucille's brother, Mildred." Anne's tone was a little cold.

Mildred, always sensitive, noticed the tone more than the words. Her face clouded with apprehension.

"Why, Anne, what 's the matter?"

"Do you remember why you never liked Modred when I used to read the 'Idyls of the King' to you?" asked Anne, with apparent irrelevance as she tested the heat of the oven.

"Yes," said Mildred, and she flushed a deep crimson. "He listened at the door."

"Exactly."

It was a very red and self-conscious little sister that Anne drew forward to shake hands with the stranger.

"Miss Carew did n't give me time to remove any of this automobile grease," he said as he saw her extended hand.

"I don't mind grease," Mildred said accommodatingly, "but I will show you where you can wash," and she led him to the little side entry, with its spotless bowl and old-fashioned pitcher stand.

Anne watched him with interest at the table as he bent upon Mildred an occasional amused or quizzical look. Anne knew that he had never had the chance to meet a girl so innocently unaware of his class-room reputation,

and she knew that he would enjoy Mildred's entire lack of self-consciousness. Anne had tried to tell him that he had judged the college girls unfairly, that they were not themselves with the professors, but he had not even been interested enough to argue.

Now she was delighted as well as surprised to see him lean forward with almost boyish eagerness to refute the girl's impulsive statement that she hoped Tad Shippee would be freed.

"I can't bring myself to read this awful Shippee murder," sighed Mrs. Carew, righteously. "Besides, the print is so fine these days that it 's all a body can do to read headlines."

"I 've been following this, contrary to my custom," he answered her, and then turned at once to Mildred. "I 've been following it because of its effect upon young people just like you," he added sternly.

"Why, what do you mean? Don't you want to have the poor boy freed? You 'd not ruin his life for one miserable mistake?"

"I should punish him as he deserves." His tone was grim.

"But that means death," Mildred protested.

"Certainly. Few enough of our criminals in this country are ever indicted; still fewer are punished according to the law."

"You sound awfully severe. I 'd hate to have you find me doing anything I should n't." Mildred pretended to shiver as she spoke.

"Dr. Bernays practises what he preaches, too," Anne added lightly.

He smiled a little as if he did not intend to take the conversation too seriously.

"There is little hope for the future of a country that excuses its lawbreakers," he declared, and Anne recognized the class-room tone in which he pronounced a thing finally settled and done with.

"Ain't you going to have another one of Anne's biscuits?" urged Mrs. Carew, peaceably.

"So you can cook as well as teach poetry," he said as he eyed with satisfaction the deliciously browned rolls that Mildred passed him.

"You will discover if you stay here that Anne can do everything," Mildred put in loyally.

"You have a champion, I see." He smiled across at Anne, and there was a look in his eyes that Lucille would have been surprised to see. Anne was beginning to find him unusually friendly in a dim, indefinite way quite apart from his conversation, and she wondered if Dr. Bernays himself was aware of how he had changed.

"I have always had a champion," Anne laughed. "As long ago as when Milly here was scarcely able to talk, if I led the three of us into trouble, Milly always ran to mother with the defense, 'Anne did n't did it, Muvver, Anne did n't did it!' "

"I generally added that Myrtle did do it," Mildred put in dryly. "I was never one to let the burden of blame lie unclaimed."

"My second daughter you have not met, Professor." Mrs. Carew smiled fondly. "She has been married recently and gone away to live. Of course I can't say it for myself, but the neighbors always said that she was the prettiest girl in the country."

"Oh, Myrtle has looks." Mildred's tone was careless. "The trouble is you always get more than you deserve in this world if you have curly hair."

Dr. Bernays laughed outright, but Mildred watched him unsmilingly and then added:

"No man believes that. I suppose that 's why they laugh?"

"You get what you deserve anyway," he said soberly.

"I try to think so," contributed Mrs. Carew. "I always look on the bright side. We used to live in New York State, Dr. Bernays, but my husband had to come here for his health. It was a great trial to settle down at Bantam Hill, although my husband used to say that a walk through these fields and woods rested him like nothing else."

"I can well believe it," Dr. Bernays answered politely.

Mrs. Carew, once conversationally started, gathered courage. She turned to Anne.

"Lindy Pearson and Mis' Hoskins are speakin' again," she said. "Lindy was waitin' for Mis' Hoskins to ask her before she went down there, and the sewin' circle meets there next time. So I just told Susan about it, and she come in just as nice as you please, when you and Belinda were out in the dining-room and she says: 'Mis' Pearson, will you be down next week? We hope you 'll feel like comin',' and Lindy spoke up as sweet as honey and she says: 'Thank you, Mis' Hoskins. I 'll be pleased to come.' So now she 's got her special invitation she feels all right."

"Are n't people silly? You went to Mrs. Hoskins and Lindy had come to you, and yet everybody felt just the same inside as they had before. I can't bear such sensitive feelings," Mildred said impetuously, forgetful of the guest, but he threw an approving glance at her, as her mother answered calmly:

"Well, Mildred, it is a great satisfaction to be a peacemaker. And we all felt much better about goin' down to Susan's."

"Custard-pie for dessert?" exclaimed Mildred, irrelevantly. Then her eyes twinkled as she looked across at Anne. "Allee samee as horse he kick the dirt in?" she asked.

Anne laughed and turned to Dr. Bernays.

"One of our friends, with a Chinese cook, served a custard-pie once when we were there for dinner. It looked rather queer on top. I thought it was cinnamon, but the hostess seemed in doubt, so she called Gee. He was not at all loath to explain. 'Oh, yes,' he said,—and I shall never forget how glad he seemed to tell all about it,—'I leave pie on back step so he get cool. Horse, he kick the dirt in. No matter. You eat him allee samee.' "

Dr. Bernays watched Anne's face for a second longer than was absolutely necessary for the enjoyment of the story, and Mildred, who missed very little that had to do with Anne, instantly made a conclusion in her own romantic mind. She told Anne about it after supper when they were putting away what was left of that same pie.

"That man gets nicer and nicer. And, Anne, he just loves to look at you."

"Oh, nonsense," Anne answered almost sharply in her surprise and disapproval. But she felt her cheeks flame when he studied her face a few minutes afterward in the sitting-room. Mildred seemed to have turned his fine unconsciousness of himself and Anne into something that spoiled it all for Anne. However, it was easy to forget the little sister's foolish remark after talking with Dr. Bernays for a while. He was delightfully unlike any one

that Anne had ever met, and while it was true that he looked quite steadily at her when he talked or listened, she noticed that it was equally true of him when he was talking to some one else. In fact, his quizzical brown eyes, fixed so quietly upon Mrs. Carew, obviously embarrassed her, and she had less than usual to say that evening. Anne left her mother to discuss the problem of taking him to board, for she wanted him to know that she herself would have nothing to do with the arrangements. When he finally settled the matter and suggested getting his suitcase from the car, Anne went for the lantern and offered to show him the way through the yard to the old red barn where he had put his car.

"Afterwards you can do this for yourself," she laughed, with a delightful feeling of already knowing him better through the very prospect of having him with them.

"I should be glad to do it to-night," he said obligingly, "although I know that Lucille has often told you how I enjoy being waited on."

"Of course she has. I suppose all women delight in discussing the weaknesses of their men folk with some one else." Anne's voice was gay as she led him through the dim entry and out upon the side porch.

The night was very dark and starless, but there was a faint breath of early flowers in the air and the grass was soft and fresh beneath their feet.

"Does n't Maryland seem a long way off?" Anne asked a little wistfully.

He could read her tone if not her face, and he answered with unusual gentleness:

"I can see how very lonely you must have been sometimes."

"Oh, never with Mildred here." The answer came with quick loyalty, but it was an unconscious admission of many things that a few short hours in the house had taught him.

Anne held the lantern high for him to see his way through the unfamiliar barn to the corner where he had left his car. As he turned with the suitcase in his hand, he could not help pausing to enjoy the picture that she made, the yellow light falling upon her soft hair and casting shadows over her face and neck. He did not tell her that she was very beautiful at that moment, for he had always had the idea that very beautiful women did not exist outside of fiction, and in addition to this he would not have known how to put such a statement into words sufficiently commonplace to express only his meaning and nothing else.

But he looked at her, nevertheless, and took away a very clear picture of her, which afterwards mixed itself rather strangely with his discussion of New Hampshire glaciers, their relative position, and apparent magnitude.

CHAPTER XVIII

"WELL, I hear you got a new guest comin' down to stay a spell with you," remarked Cy Whittredge as he lounged in the door of the farm kitchen after taking Mrs. Carew's grocery order.

"Well, you must have a telegraph up there to your store, for he never come here till last night," Mrs. Carew replied. She always preferred to tell her own news.

"No, we ain't no telegraph; my wife, she 's better 'n any telegraph or daily paper, either. She was a-settin' in the livin'-room when the professor's new car went by last night, and she see he had a suitcase in with him. So she sez to me, 'Cy, I 'll bet you anything the Carews are going to board that friend of Anne's while he 's diggin' up round here!' An' when he was in the store this mornin' buyin' some tobacco and a package of crackers, I up and asked him. Thinks I, 'You don't find out nothin' these days thess 't is by askin',' so he sez, he calculated to come down here to-day. 'Board?' sez I. 'Yes,' sez he, 'but I can't tell you how much till I find out myself.' 'Oh, that 's all right,' I sez. 'I can ask Mis' Carew any time,' an' he went off kinder high-toned. Come to think on it, I 'll bet a doughnut he was tryin' to give me some city sass about the price of his board."

"Does Dr. Bernays smoke?" ejaculated Mrs. Carew, who was apt to fix upon one thing in a monologue like Cy's and cling to that alone until she could inform herself further.

"He smokes a pipe," said Mildred, calmly. "I saw it in his pocket."

"My, land! I never would have believed it." Her mother's tone was incredulous.

"What 's the harm, Mother? He has an automobile, and that will make up for it."

Cyrus eyed his reliable gray mare ruminatively.

"You never know where you are when you 're monkeyin' around in an automobile. Now when I leave Calico I 'm satisfied that she will be in about the same condition next time I use her."

"Just give me a chance at a car," Mildred cried, with twinkling eyes, as she jammed a generous lunch box into a protesting and already bulky school-bag.

"You 'd run it, I ain't a doubt." He took in her youth and joyousness with keen eyes. "What 's become of the young feller that come kitin' round here last year in a big white tourin' car? Anne give him the mitten?" He winked to make the last part of his remark seem less personal.

"I think she did," Mrs. Carew responded with the dignity that the situation demanded.

"Well, Anne 's a mighty fine girl. My wife see a story of hers in the 'Hammerton Herald,' and she said you ought to be proud of that girl. I wonder how much she got for a thing like that?"

Mrs. Carew had no idea what Anne would receive for the story in question. She had never seen the story nor heard it mentioned. Her face flushed painfully at the endeavor to think quickly enough to say the right thing, but Mildred saved the day by interrupting with sisterly pride:

"That was copied from a syndicate. Anne has had

three stories taken by a big syndicate, and they have gone all over the country. Anne would n't write just for the old 'Hammerton Herald,' " she added in scorn.

"Well, well, I did n't know that." Cy paused on his way to the door. He was obviously impressed. "Anything beside the sugar and chocolate, Mis' Carew?"

Mrs. Carew wrinkled her brows. She knew that a little later in the morning several things would occur to her, but she was totally unable to recall them at the moment, and she would not give in to her memory to the extent of writing down her orders.

Cy came back with one more question before he finally departed on his rounds. Mrs. Carew looked up and saw him standing in the doorway again, his good-natured, simple face puckered with curiosity and admiration.

"Does she do 'em easy?" he asked.

"What?" Mrs. Carew's mind was a blank. "Oh, the stories? La, yes." She refused to acknowledge ignorance of this most elemental phase of Anne's work.

"She does not," contradicted Mildred, disrespectfully. "She sits up half the night, and comes down in the morning looking like a ghost, and when I ask her how many stories she 's written, she says, 'One barely started!' I don't call that writing easily."

"Why, no, it seems as if 'most any of us could do 'em that way if it was worth the trouble." Cyrus had once had leanings toward a college education, but had failed to pass the entrance examinations. Ever since, however, he had spoken in a semi-careless way of culture, as a thing that he had casually looked over and rejected.

"You 'll be late to school," Mrs. Carew said to Mildred tartly. Mildred kissed her mother's sallow cheek, and set off for school, and Cy took his leisurely depart-

ure, but Mrs. Carew stopped her work and sat with folded hands for a long time thinking. She preferred to understand her daughters, and she could not understand Anne. Mildred, too, was growing increasingly difficult, with her erratic bursts of affection and her strange fits of silence. Mrs. Carew had heard the girls talking of Chips one night, but it had been a long time after the arrival of certain letters addressed in a pale blue, rather ornate hand, before Mildred had said very much to her mother about Mr. Chippendale Hall. Myrtle had never shown the slightest hesitancy in discussing and confiding every high-school affair; in fact, Myrtle's favorite subject was herself. But Anne's influence upon Mildred was clear. Anne was as close-mouthed as her father had been. Mrs. Carew had not yet recovered from the humiliation of having told Mrs. Hoskins that Anne and Edward were engaged.

Anne's entrance during her mother's period of dissatisfied brooding served to hasten Mrs. Carew's injured outburst.

"What you got your hat on for at this time in the mornin'?

"Good news. I 'm going for a ride." Anne stooped to pick up her mother's ball of yarn and then, along with the ball, deposited a little yellow slip in Mrs. Carew's lap.

"Check from Long and Weber for a syndicate story," she exclaimed briefly, but her eyes were bright. "Dr. Bernays brought our mail just now when he came. He forgot his statistical something or other, and came back for it, and I 'm going to ride uptown with him and buy some things I want to sew on for Myrtle. Is n't that check fine?"

Mrs. Carew smiled a little unwillingly. Anne was giving her no cause for complaint.

"You don't always tell me much about your stories," she said as she put on her spectacles and examined the check. "My land, it 's for twenty dollars."

"Yes, I decided that this one was worth telling about. I am going to spend it all on Myrtle. I want to be extravagant just for once."

Mrs. Carew could not help showing her pleasure.

"You are a good girl, Anne. You ought to save some of that for yourself."

"Not when I can buy things like the ones I 'm going to buy to-day," Anne said a little breathlessly.

"Had n't you better go to Hammerton?" For once the trip to the nearest city, considered by the girls a luxury, was suggested by Mrs. Carew herself.

"If I could only get hold of Mildred and take her along! It 's great fun to have her with me, but she ought not to miss school."

"I don't think she 'd object much," her mother answered dryly.

"No, she probably would n't, but I do. You see it 's almost time for her spring examinations. However, I think I 'd like to go. Then I can buy some things that I can't buy here."

"Well, if I had time to get ready—but I don't really feel much like goin' way over there."

Anne stooped instantly and kissed her mother, but her voice was firm and a little hurried.

"Dr. Bernays is waiting now, although you were a dear to think of it. Does this hat look all right? I 'll catch the morning express and come back at three."

"Be sure you look at the cloth real careful to see if

it 's good,'' was Mrs. Carew's parting injunction as Anne sped away.

''Why, I feel as if I were bound on a real holiday, only the worst of it is I am going all alone,'' Anne said as she tried not to watch the manipulations by which Dr. Bernays was coaxing his car into action. Once the engine showed signs of life and the little car started briskly down the hill, he turned to the girl at his side. She was wearing a brown hat with a pink facing, and her suit was brown. Dr. Bernays had no idea how one managed to put pink stuff like that on straw and make it stay, but he had watched Anne's clever fingers manipulating the thing after he had returned with her to the house the evening before, and for a wonder he identified the hat. Anne did not know that it was the first hat he had ever recognized before in his life.

Anne had ridden only once before with him in a machine, and she had not known that it was his custom to turn so squarely about whenever he found it necessary to speak to his companion. The fact that Dr. Bernays was finding her pleasant to look at was finally borne in upon her, but his entire unconsciousness of his own pleasure quite robbed the affair of all sentiment, lending it, instead, a touch of humor that kept her eyes dancing and her lips upturned. It seemed a long time ago since she had sped over the mountain roads with Bynner that one bitter-sweet day in October. And as she thought of that day her eyes grew graver. She could not help comparing for a moment the powerful white car in which she had ridden that day to the chugging, puffing machine that was now laboring up Dilloways Hill, but she would not allow herself to think of Bynner's handsome face as he scanned the white road ahead or bent toward her

with a deference that was more tender than he knew. It was all over, and Bynner had gone out of her life. She did not regret him for a moment, but she dared not even yet ask herself if she felt the same about Edward.

"There 's Mildred just at the top of the next hill," she cried as they rounded the bend by Mrs. Salt's.

"Yes, I passed her as I was coming back. She bids fair to be an interesting young lady."

"She is going to be the joy and torment of my life!" Anne exclaimed.

He looked at her tolerantly.

"I think you take her too seriously."

She was saved a reply, for Mildred had seen them. She waited for them to come up to her, and struck a foolish little pose, which she always characterized as "The Dying Swan."

"I don't have to go to school," she cried.

Anne smiled at the piquant face framed in wind-blown hair. Mildred was never so attractive as when her curls were disarranged. She was twisting one now as she looked up at Anne and Dr. Bernays.

"You 've decided to come and take me to ride," she said, with blithe disregard for probability.

"Would you like to ride, Miss Mildred?" asked Dr. Bernays.

"Yes, we want you to get to school as soon as possible, so we are going to crowd you in here with us, but we expect you to be very grateful."

Mildred climbed in jubilantly, as if resolved to postpone further requests till later, but she was instantly aware of Anne's suit and hat.

"You 've got on your going-away things," she accused.

"Little girls should n't ask questions," Anne teased, but she patted Mildred's hand. "I got a letter from Long and Weber to-day," she explained as Dr. Bernays struggled with his gears in crossing the railroad track.

"Good. Going to Hammerton?" Mildred's answer was succinct. She did not doubt that Anne was taking her along.

"Just for some things for Myrtle that I am delighted to be able to get. There 's no train due till the Hammerton express," she volunteered to their companion, who was anxiously peering up and down the curving track.

"That 's very fortunate. My gear shift, if that is what you call it, seems stuck."

"It would be an honor to be hit by that luxurious Pullman that comes through about now," Mildred said wickedly. "I want to travel some time just so I can look out of the window while I 'm eating breakfast and wave to the people who are going to work."

Anne paid no attention to Mildred's ambition, but she leaned forward and gave the lever a quick jerk. Dr. Bernays looked a little bewildered, but as his car was showing signs of starting, he said nothing till they reached the main street. "I take it that you can run a car as well as trim a hat," he ventured.

"Considering that we were on the track I thought you would n't mind my interference."

"Not in the least. I never was shown how to drive," he explained placidly. "I merely made arrangements for the use of this car, and then when the man from the garage brought it over I proceeded to run it, and I am really beginning to see a good deal of sense in the way it is put together, but at first it seemed to be rather a hap-

hazard affair. You could do so many different things and achieve the same result."

Mildred did not interrupt him, although she knew that they were passing the school, but Anne, with a smile at his confession in regard to his driving and a word of gratitude for the ride he had given them, was preparing to get out. Mildred heaved a long sigh as she picked up her school-bag.

"Well, since you see me forced into that old dungeon over there on such a nice day as this, I hope you will send me a thought while you are taking life easy to-day." She stood with Anne beneath the old shade-trees and looked up at him ruefully. "I hate to work," she added.

"Why should you hint that I don't work?" he inquired, without a smile. If there was a sign of a twinkle in the deep-set eyes Anne did not dare look for it.

"Because," Mildred explained dauntlessly, "most of these long-sounding government positions where you look up and jot down and file away are n't very hard on you."

He gazed at her a minute and then laughed.

"Down with the statistical department! Is that it?" he said. "Miss Carew, why did you get out? I thought you were going to Hammerton?"

"I am," she answered and then said to Mildred: "You have time to come down to the station with me if you want to. I think we have detained you long enough, Dr. Bernays. And my train goes in a few minutes."

"But I am going to Hammerton," he said. "If you care to trust my driving."

Anne did not appear to hesitate, although she was frankly surprised. She turned at once to Mildred. "Then you run in and show Miss Snell that you can get there on time for once."

"Yes, I might wash blackboards and clean erasers," Mildred retorted scornfully. "You treat me just like a little girl, Anne Carew."

"Good-by, dear. We must n't talk here any longer." Anne turned a determined back upon her little sister.

"Bring me something, Anne?" Mildred pleaded, with an angelic smile, when she saw that Anne was really going.

"Of course." Then as the little car suddenly leaped and fairly darted away under some unexpected manipulation by its driver, Anne laughed. "Of course she is n't a little girl when she acts like that," she said.

"She wanted to go, and I don't blame her. I never liked school," was Dr. Bernays' unexpected reply, made all the more passionate by his fierce search for the lever that would keep the car from coughing and jumping halfway across the street.

"How do you soothe this thing?" he asked crossly.

"It 's partly your gas," Anne said in a matter-of-fact tone as she reached over and did something mysterious to his wheel.

"Well, when we get on a straight road will you show me what these various mechanisms mean? I have intended to take the thing to pieces and study it out, but I have n't had time yet, for I had a report to send away in a hurry."

"The car that you chose is n't as simple to run as some of the others," Anne said judicially. "And besides it is second-hand, is n't it?"

"Yes, I reasoned that a very high-priced car, second-hand, would be more satisfactory. I did n't care how the thing looked if it would run." Her companion's tone was glum. He had a vague feeling, which he did not

allow himself to dwell on for long, that the hero of a romance should know how to run an automobile without having a woman help him.

The thought was gone almost as soon as it had come. He could not hold himself responsible for vagrant fancies. Moreover, Miss Carew was probably engaged, and in addition to that, he was not a marrying man. But why had he never thought before of how very pretty Anne Carew was? Surely Lucille had entertained her enough for him to have had a chance to judge her before.

As if their minds had finally arrived at the same point, regardless of how the thought had originated, Anne asked him suddenly:

"How does it happen that Lucille is n't up here taking care of you?"

His face grew very grave. Later she understood his expression.

"Lucille has been much occupied this winter," he said, and then he added justly, "She has given up a great deal for me all her life."

"I know," said Anne. She was recalling the gossip among the girls of a lover whom Lucille had sent away when her brother was sick and alone and needed her.

"Everybody seems to sacrifice," he added bruskly. "You ought not to be at home on that farm."

"There is no question but that I should be there since Myrtle does not want to live at home." Anne spoke with decision.

"Could your sister have arranged to live in Bantam Hill?"

Anne hesitated. Myrtle was not easy to explain.

"My brother-in-law had an offer in the western part

of New York State that she wanted him to take, although I think she did not realize that his chance was here in Hammerton where every one knew him. They are building a very fine hospital here, as you will see.''

''Did your father die recently?'' he asked, but he did not turn to look at Anne as she answered him, for there were tears in her voice.

''I was just a little girl when he died, but he had been a playmate of mine always, and afterwards I missed him all day long.''

There was a pathos more poignant than Anne realized in that simple little statement.

''Do you want to run this car now?'' he asked abruptly.

She appreciated his apparent ignorance of the choke in her voice even while she marveled at his showing so much interest in her family. Perhaps she had not done him justice in Maryland, and if she had really talked to him alone often he would have shown her a different side of his character. She had to acknowledge that she had never tried to know him better. He seemed like a stranger to her now, and yet a very friendly stranger, with whom one could imagine a pleasant intimacy in the future. And he was wonderfully meek in regard to the car, when she finally offered to change seats with him.

He listened with attention as she explained what she had already been discovering through experience, but she was embarrassed to find that her explanations were seldom enough for him. He nodded at last, and took the wheel again, being one of the men who dislike to be passive with a woman present, and he managed it with assurance this time, but as they rolled into Hammerton

he said with decision that he intended to discover the reason for several things that night.

"And you can teach me," Anne laughed, "for you notice I did n't know."

"You have what Pater calls the feminine conscience. You glide easily over what the masculine mind questions and masters."

"Now you are Dr. Bernays again," she said daringly.

He looked his interrogation, that fine line coming again between his eyes.

"The pedagogue," she laughed. "I must get out here and thank you for a very delightful ride."

"And you for a lesson," he added.

"Even though you called it inadequate?"

"It served its purpose," he said. He did not ask her when she was returning, nor did he tell her that he had enjoyed having her with him, but as she began her shopping she was pleasantly aware of his new friendliness.

The day could not have been more inviting, the ride had been a pleasant surprise, and the luxury of a full pocket-book was not to be scorned, and yet without any reason Anne felt her spirits sinking as the day progressed. There was a dissatisfied longing for something more than a few hours in Hammerton buying baby things for Myrtle and then a dusty ride back on the afternoon train and a hurried preparation for a dinner that would reconcile four hungry people to her absence through the day. Anne did not know why she was not happy, so she indulged in the luxury of a box of candy and a good lunch. The shops teased her with their display of things that she could not help feeling she needed even though she knew they would be out of place at Bantam

Hill. She satisfied her love of the beautiful in one or two purchases for Mildred, the extravagance of which would not appear to Mrs. Carew, and she reveled in the soft white nainsooks and embroideries that were to go to Myrtle. For herself she bought a book of poems and one of them she learned on the way from Hammerton; but she felt when she said it that it would never be quite true in her own case.

"I shall walk freely yet,
Who am beset
With burrs and brambles clinging,
And flowers on either hand
Where I stand,
Which I pluck, singing,
And my steep road forget."

There were three stanzas, and Anne said them over and over to herself so that at last the lines haunted her even when she was busy with other tasks than learning poetry.

Mrs. Carew was in the kitchen when Anne returned. The house was warm and disorderly; the sitting-room had not been picked up or the shades straightened. Anne hurried up-stairs to put her things away before she went into the kitchen, knowing that her mother would detain her too long if she did not prepare to stay there and work while she talked. Her own little room looked unusually bare somehow, perhaps in comparison with some of the furnished rooms on which she had feasted her eyes in the Hammerton art store. Later, she was always telling herself, she would make her room over into a den or studio, but for the present she had no inspiration toward changing it. Its neat bareness was a rest after her mother's cluttered possessions.

On her way down-stairs she paused at the door of her mother's room, wondering if she could not leave there a surprise which would be more pleasing than any commonplace showing of what she had bought. As Anne's eyes rested upon the room she smiled and sighed.

Mrs. Carew was not a housekeeper who ever tolerated dirt. She merely cluttered things without intentionally doing so, and she had worn herself out for years trying to "pick up" her house by moving everything from one place to another, and dropping something else in the meantime.

She was always packing away her accumulated belongings in boxes and then putting the boxes under the bed or on top of some old dresser or high-boy. She was a conscientious saver of bottles of all shapes and sizes, of candy boxes, and ribbons, and a thousand odds and ends which she could not bring herself to throw away. Anne stood at the door now, taking in, with lifted eyebrows and tightened mouth, the aspect of the room. There was a basket of old things from the attic, half looked over; a suitcase used as a dumping ground for some homeless bits of discarded underwear, and now projecting from beneath the unmade bed; some clean clothes put aside to be mended and not yet taken care of; a work-basket heaped with a variety of castaway articles; every table, chair, and shelf was utilized as a temporary lodging-place for things that could quite easily have been put away at the time they were used. Anne's love for her mother had long ago lost the daughterly, dependent quality that had once closed her eyes to these things. Her affection was almost maternal now, but there was mingled in it a certain clear-eyed criticism and a rebel touch of bitterness that sometimes tinged her remarks unless she

kept a watch upon her tongue. And yet there were times, too, when Anne loved her mother almost fiercely, with a kind of mortified penitence at ever having found fault with her. She would be tormented by the thought of the years to come when she would not have her, and at such times no sacrifice or denial seemed too great to make her mother's life happy.

That Myrtle had always been the favorite, no one in the family denied, and Anne knew that her mother missed her younger daughter far more than any one guessed. The work-basket was even now spilling out some fine work that was probably for Myrtle. Mrs. Carew insisted on sewing despite all warning that the delicate work would hurt her eyes.

Anne sat down on the edge of the bed, and slipped her surprise out of its tissue-paper wrappings. With trembling fingers she pulled out the dainty bit of cream white cloth and silk. There was a tiny embroidered bonnet to match the coat, and Anne held it up on her hand and looked at it with dewy eyes. She laid the coat across her knees, and fastened together the tiny neckband, fumbling a little with the buttons that seemed so ridiculously small to her slender, unaccustomed fingers. She held the soft little thing up again, and spread out upon her hand one tiny, empty sleeve. Then with impulsive tenderness she laid her cheek against it.

"Anne," called Mrs. Carew, from the foot of the stairs, "it 's time to put the potatoes on."

CHAPTER XIX

"WHY, Milly, why are you home from school?" It was several weeks later, and Anne stood at the head of the back stairs and looked down in surprise upon Mildred, flushed and laughing, with upturned, twinkling eyes.

"Anne, it 's such a lovely spring day!" pleaded Mildred.

"It 's going to pour buckets in about an hour," returned Anne, severely. "That is n't the reason, Milly, and you might just as well tell me first as last."

"Well, then, come down and sit on the stair here by me and I 'll 'fess up. Where 's the Government's favorite child?"

"Mildred!"

"I beg your pardon. Where is the most illustrious Dr. Arthur Bernays?"

"Away working on the Bell Hill farmland till this afternoon. Why all this prelude?"

"Well, I 've had a letter from Chips. He is coming to see us for a few hours this afternoon. Hurrah!"

"And you never went to school?" Anne tried to be reproachful as she looked down at her radiant little sister.

"School? *School?* I should say *not!* Who 's going to get this old shack all cleared up, and the chairs pulled over the bare places in the carpet, and the best china down from the chiny cubbid?"

"But *why* is he coming?"

"To see *me,* goosie! He 's passing through and he 's going to stop till the nine-ten express."

"But you don't pass through Bantam Hill on your way to very many places." Anne tilted Mildred's chin back and looked at her. "Did you ask him to come, honey?"

"I did n't, I did n't," Mildred vociferated, but she winked rapidly under Anne's accusing eye. "But what if I did? I only said when I wrote that *if* some Friday he happened to be near, and *if* he would let me know, why maybe he might stop a little while *if* he were willing."

"Well," Anne sighed, "I suppose that 's the way to get what you want in this world. Only, young lady, you 've got to work. And after four you 've got to keep still in the front part of the house, for Dr. Bernays is going to be working on a report that must go in to-night."

"Oh, Dr. Bernays again! He 's a nice old fossil, Anne. I 'm really quite fond of him and I adore to hear him get started talking about things, criminals and prisons and all, but just wait till you see Chips!"

"It may be as well for me to see him before this goes any further," said Anne, wisely, getting up from the stair and shaking out her apron briskly.

"What shall I do first?" Mildred demanded. Anne mused a little. "Go up-stairs and do the chamber work while I go and tell mother. I may have to explain." She drew Mildred close to her. "You should be scolded, dear."

"I don't see why." Mildred started away from Anne triumphantly. "I 've been wanting to see him, and he 's been wanting to come." Her voice floated back from

Anne's room. "If you want anything in this world you should take it, Anne, unless somebody else wants it more." Anne smiled at the memory of this remark when she had seen Chips.

She watched Mildred through the busy, happy day, with a curious depression, which she could not fight off despite her whole-hearted efforts to be cordial and sympathetic. She had lost her little sister all at once and found in her place a girl quite different from the old Mildred. As the day advanced, the frank joyousness with which she had hailed the coming of Chips changed to a trembling of self-consciousness, which she tried to hide under the guise of gaiety and indifference, but which showed itself in every blush and little nervous action.

Anne was frankly appalled. She had been given no idea that the affair was really serious. She tried gently to question Mildred in the quiet time directly after the luncheon dishes were washed, when the two girls were alone together in the kitchen. But Mildred discouraged questions. She avoided Anne, yet seemed to keep wistfully within her reach. At the door into the sitting-room she paused undecidedly, her hands full of freshly laundered things, which she was taking up-stairs.

"Anne." There was a peculiar vibrant throb to her voice. Yet it did not sound sure of itself.

"'Yes, dear." Anne did not look up from the biscuits she was putting to raise. Something warned her not to frighten away Mildred's confidence.

"Anne, do you think I 'm silly to be so particular about everything all of a sudden?"

"Why, no." Anne looked up now, innocently enough. "I think it is only a compliment to our friends to enjoy preparing for them when we can." Evidently that

remark was a mistake, for it made Mildred's effort to explain herself quite unnecessary. Anne would have retracted her kind commonplace, but it was too late. Mildred had backed away from the door a step or two. Now she looked out into the discouraging sheet of rain that was beating with special fury against the little leaded panes.

"I thought I 'd press out my white dress this afternoon," she remarked tentatively.

Anne hesitated.

"I really don't think it 's going to clear, honey. Why don't you wear your pretty blue dress that I fixed the collar for?" Mildred lifted her chin and wrinkled her nose a little.

"I look so young in that," she pronounced.

Anne smiled decorously into the roller-towel. Then she hung up her apron and crossed to the place where Mildred still stood, shifting from one foot to the other in obvious dissatisfaction with wardrobes in general and hers in particular.

"My dear, you do like Chips a very great deal, don't you?" she ventured. Mildred stood squarely on both feet now and, in a sudden, incomprehensible fit of boldness, she faced Anne, with unashamed eyes.

"I 'm perfectly crazy about him," she said. Then as if the sound of her own confession had frightened her, she dropped her eyes and, clutching the freshly ironed bureau set, bent her head and flew past Anne and up the front stairs.

Anne stood still for a moment, her eyes a trifle narrower than usual and perhaps a little quizzical too. This was not "Falling in love after graduation, in case everybody liked him." Then her heart softened to this

little sister who was so eagerly meeting her first great experience. Mildred was so adorably young. What a wonderful thing to be sixteen! Anne's twenty-six years all at once weighed her down as if they were twice their number. Mildred in the rapture of her first love, Myrtle with the wonder of motherhood stealing graciously over her, both seemed to put Anne outside the pale of real and vital living and to invest her with a sort of bitter indifference as if she had scorned in her time what they had gathered to themselves and found good.

Mildred had treated Anne with a sensitive shyness that Anne almost resented. It was as if Mildred had thought Anne would not understand if she had told her before. In the same way Myrtle in her letters had lately assumed a patronizing air toward her older, unmarried sister. This was so natural to Mrs. Carew that she could not see Anne's point of view when she ceased to show the eager interest that she had felt at first. What Anne thought as her quick fingers plied the needle through the dainty little dresses, her mother never knew, but she wondered once in a while as she looked curiously at Anne's fair, bent head if the girl would ever marry and what kind of man he would be.

Anne went slowly into the empty sitting-room after Mildred had gone up-stairs, but she did not want to sew. She tried to read the book that Miss Hettie Noble had given her the last time she was in the library, but it did not hold her attention. She wondered if it must not seem stupid, too, to Hettie Noble, who had loved and suffered so much more than her quiet face confessed. What did people do with memories like Hettie's? They could not talk about them; they would not even dare to

think about them, and yet the memories would always be there, like muffled crying, and the only sound to drown them would be the laughter of other people. After all there lay the fun of writing, to make a world of one's own where even a dreary afternoon like this could be filled mysteriously with joy by just a few strokes of the pen. What fun it would be to take Hettie and give her what she had always missed, and keep from her the cross she had borne for so many years! And what a blessed relief to write the story of a girl like Anne herself, who might say all the things Anne could never say and do the things Anne might never do! There was in her that day, although she hardly realized the reason for it, the urge of self-expression, a desire to put into words all the bitterness of unfulfilled ambitions, the heartbreak of a maiden loneliness like Hettie's, the tremulous attempt at bravado that Anne herself frequently made in order to face the dire mixture of tragedy and humor that she found in her quaintly ordered life.

Suddenly Anne looked up. Her eyes were wide and blue with the dawn of a speculation almost become a purpose. Things should happen as they ought to, as they might have, heroes should enter when they were needed most—

Just then the sitting-room door opened and Dr. Bernays came in.

"That 's the kind of book I 'm going to write," said Anne.

He looked a little blank, and then he took off his hat and adjusted his glasses and said:

"No, really?"

She wished then that he would wear eye-glasses. That

little motion of the hands about his spectacles made him look almost antique, and he could not be more than—more than—Anne knitted her brows and looked at him gravely.

"Now, Miss Carew, I wonder if your thoughts are worth a penny."

"I was wondering how old you are," said Anne, with such unaccustomed bluntness that he laughed outright. It was just the kind of remark that she would have checked in Mildred. But she was noticing how his eyes wrinkled at the corners when he laughed like that, and suddenly the idea came to her that what Lucille had said was true and that Arthur Bernays without his spectacles and his academic expression was a really good-looking man.

"Well, Miss Carew, I am thirty-eight, and I have been feeling this same age for so long that it 's almost time to grow young again."

"You don't seem as thirty-eight-ish now as you did in Maryland," she remarked, picking up her work-basket and preparing to go up-stairs.

"Don't go," he said, "at least not until you tell me what you meant by the remark that you made when I opened the door."

"I was just planning a book," Anne explained, making up her mind to be quite frank even though he laughed at her.

"So I imagined. Do you think you can write one?"

"I can't be a Maupassant or a Henry James, and I don't expect to write anything that you will recommend to your classes, or even read yourself."

He recognized the hint of defiance under the lightness of her tone.

"You misunderstand my taste in literature," he replied. "I feel sure that I should enjoy whatever you wrote. I have not forgotten your essay on 'Thackeray, the Man.' It was delightful. What else have you done recently, by the way?"

Anne's eyes twinkled as she answered gravely:

"Two recipes for making jell, three ideas for Washington's birthday, two syndicate love stories, and also some hints to bachelor girls, printed, but never paid for."

He ran his hand through his hair and looked at her. Then he saw that she was laughing. She had seated herself in a low, old-fashioned chair by the door and seemed to be enjoying the conversation. He felt suddenly challenged, as if he knew that she expected him to be shocked at her literary output.

"What did you hint to bachelors?" he asked gravely.

Anne dimpled, plainly approving of him. She was taking an unruly delight in destroying his ideas of her scholarship.

"What did you hint? Or perhaps you do not care to exhibit the pottage?" His tone was bland.

She cast him a swift glance from eyes that suddenly reminded him of Lucille's pansies.

"Oh, I told them that they were too sensible, too much interested in studying out how to be real chums with a man, that they needed a little more of the clinging-vine attitude that won our grandmothers such admirable husbands at such an early age. I warned them to encourage a man to show his emotions—to—"

"You did, did you? No wonder you were never paid for such a revolutionary article. You should have

been soundly berated by some critic who knew how to do it."

"But what difference does it make?" Anne asked him. He somehow could not look at her when he answered.

"What would happen to most men if women set out to appeal to us like that?"

"But lots of women do. They do it naturally. Only you see they don't stay bachelor girls."

"But you have stayed a bachelor girl?" He wondered afterward how he had dared to encourage such a strange conversation. Anne gathered up her work again, and rose with decision.

"Yes, for reasons," she replied sweetly. "Of course the number of men who once sued for my hand would extend all the way around Bantam Hill. John used to bring in their visiting-cards in the evening heaped up on that Japanese tray that we use for hot chocolate Sunday nights. But that was in the old days before statistics became so fashionable, and I really can't give you many more details."

Dr. Bernays threw back his head and laughed. It was a jovial, wholesome rumble, which always struck Anne as not fitting its serious owner at all. Now she pretended offended dignity.

"I see you doubt me. I will prove that I can write a book, but the aspirants to my hand can never be coralled. I shall have to live under the ban of your suspicions."

His laughter followed her appreciatively as she made her unsmiling exit, but he did not answer her. Only when she had gone, and he heard her soft, serious voice replying patiently to some complaint of Mrs. Carew's in the room above, he wondered afresh at the girl who

could show so many sides to her character. And he shook his head dubiously over the "book."

Mrs. Carew was enjoying a headache this afternoon. It was due partly to the excitement of preparing for Chippendale Hall's arrival, and partly to her desire for some attention from Anne, who had been singularly neglectful of late. It did not occur to her that Anne might not be happy for, of course, if one was unhappy one talked about it, and Anne had not talked. Yet she could laugh often enough with Dr. Bernays, and make him laugh too, for surely that strange guffaw must be his. They were talking of suitors and a book. What did Anne tell her mother of her love-affairs or her books either? She would not even pay attention when her mother was in the mood to retail some of Cy Whittredge's village news. How nice it would be if Myrtle could come home again! Mrs. Carew turned on her side and closed her eyes. Anne was coming up-stairs lightly and so quickly that her mother had to conceal beneath the bedspread the book that she had been reading. Anne did not think that she should read lying down, and besides, an invalid suffering from headache should not be found with a book. Mrs. Carew did not consider herself deceitful; she was merely consistent. Her head did ache, and she was not going to risk any misunderstanding on Anne's part by showing signs of having been enjoying herself when, on the contrary, she had been quite miserable.

"Anne!" she called when she heard the slight pause outside her door.

"Why, Mother, does your head ache badly?" Anne asked, coming in from the hall and noticing the drawn shades and the white bandage, which Mrs. Carew had

readjusted. Anne spoke in that pleasantly impersonal voice that is so irritating to the sick in the presence of the well. Mrs. Carew nodded without speaking and, in nodding, displaced the bandage that shielded her eyes. Anne bent and folded it straight again. Then she moved softly about the room, picking up the things that Mrs. Carew had intended to take care of, but had somehow failed to get around to.

"Mildred is terribly excited about that boy's coming, ain't she?" Mrs. Carew murmured conversationally from her pillow. Despite her illness, she could not let slip an opportunity to talk while Anne was within hearing distance.

"She is very happy," the girl said gently.

"Do you suppose they are engaged?" her mother pursued. She might have been considered as taking the eternally feminine jump from the known to the unknown territory of any new friendship, but Anne was quite well aware that her mother was only testing her.

"Mercy, Mother, how you speculate!" Anne gave her mother the satisfaction of a show of irritation.

"Well, you can't tell about young people nowadays," retorted the older woman, forgetting her headache in her argument. "Now there was you and Edward—and again, you and Bynner—"

"Really, Dr. Bernays should be here to be convinced." Anne laughed. But before she had time to explain, Mrs. Carew raised herself in bed and stared at Anne, with the bandage lopping untidily over one ear. "Him, too?" she inquired cryptically.

Anne only stared back, totally uncomprehending.

"Is he one of them, too?" repeated her mother, with sublime disregard for antecedents or coherence.

Then Anne understood. First she burst out laughing at her mother's suggestion, then she began to resent it, and the very idea seemed repellent enough to spoil their ripening friendship.

"You had better keep to Mildred," Anne said in the "hands off" voice that even her mother was beginning to sense.

"Anne, you 're awful uppish," Mrs. Carew said querulously after a minute. "You don't seem the same lately."

"I do all I can for you." Anne's voice was unsteady. She came to the side of the bed and stood looking down at her mother. Mrs. Carew's face, turned on its side in the soft pillow, was wrinkled into petulant ugliness. With angular obstinacy the concealed book stuck out from its place beneath the bedspread. Anne's lip curled.

Mrs. Carew looked up at her tall daughter, seeming to feel the hostility in Anne's manner. All at once she was overwhelmed by self-pity. Her eyes filled.

"I 'm getting old, and nobody cares a thing about me. I wish Myrtle was here," she whimpered.

Anne sat down on the bed and took off the warm, damp linen from her mother's head. She could not cherish a grudge even for a moment as she looked at the thin, querulous face.

"Perhaps sometime Myrtle can live with you," she said gently, and laid a cool hand on her mother's temples. There actually was a throbbing of tired nerves, and Anne's hand moved back and forth with soothing precision as she talked.

"If ever you wanted to go out and stay with her, you could do it. I can always take care of Mildred, and we could close this place for a year or so. I would far rather not stay here if I am making you unhappy."

"You ain't," asserted the invalid, with spirit. Anne was delightful when she chose to be, as now, and Myrtle had never been a help about the house. But she could not put this into words.

Anne sighed, rubbed her mother's head softly till she thought she was growing sleepy, and then stole quietly out and closed the door.

She went immediately to her own room and tried to forget everything in thoughts of the book that she had boasted she could write. Yet her mother, Mildred, Myrtle, Edward, Dr. Bernays, all seemed bound up inexplicably in any plot she dallied with. She would take for her heroine a girl like Mildred. Anne could transcribe with remarkable precision the very emotions that were at war in Mildred's breast this afternoon, because she knew Mildred; she knew herself as Mildred was to-day, and the situation was created.

With the summer rain beating rhythmically against the window and the old windmill creaking in the yard, Anne set herself to write a story taken from her book of life, with Mildred as the principal character and Chips as the unknown lover.

She found herself drawing unconsciously from her book of life, translating the little scene down-stairs at noon as a conversation between mother and daughter, till Mildred grew to live upon her pages, and Anne forgot time and place while she put her soul into that other girl who was so near her and whom she called Eleanor.

Chips, however, was her despair. He would not act

like a real person, and she admitted at last that it was because he was not real in her own mind. She mechanically drew him as tall and clean-cut,—Anne was not then weary of the phrase,—but somehow mere height and clean-cutness did not help him to speak like a human being and act like a lover. Anne bit the end of her pen and frowned. The professor had been right. All this description of the way a girl felt was not a story. There must be action. She had no imagination. She could not write a book. Perhaps when Chips came it would be different. She could just transfer him to the page as she found him in real life. And she made a little wistful prayer that she would find him worthy of the real Mildred, as well as the Eleanor whose future must wait a little while her creator collected more material.

So Anne gave her pen a rest while she leaned back and looked out upon the quiet, rain-drenched yard.

The storm was over. In the west the sky was tinged with pink where a gorgeous pageant of rain clouds had just dispersed. Anne opened her window to the sweet, wet freshness that was in the air. She heard Mildred humming in snatches as she came down the hall. In a moment the sisters faced each other, Anne to gaze with a newly inspired interest into the flushed and sparkling face, while in her brain her story grew and shaped itself, fed by Mildred's every gesture.

"He will be here in another hour. It is n't too wet for me to drive up, is it, Anne? I don't want John to go."

Anne smiled at her indulgently.

"Put on your long coat if you are going, and be careful of the hill down by Dilloway's. There 's a bad gully there."

"I 'll be careful." Mildred spoke a little breathlessly. If Anne had crossed her at this time, she was thinking, it might have been more proof that the day was real and she was not dreaming. At the door she was halted by Anne's impulsive question: "What does Chips look like, dear? You have never said."

"Oh,"—Mildred paused after this first word, not as if at a loss for words, but as if overcome by the task of presenting him as he deserved,—"he is light and very tall, and not very big. I mean not big like Edward and Bynner. He is very aristocratic-looking." Anne shivered, but Mildred went on, gaining speed as she progressed, correcting every impression that she gave as if it were not worthy of her subject. "He is n't scrawny, you know, Anne. His voice is very low, but it is n't the kind you don't listen to. He is never in doubt about what to say, but I don't mean he talks all the time either—"

"That will do." Anne laughed. "You would never make a story-writer, Mildred."

"Well, what of it?" Mildred stared at Anne's apparent inconsequence.

"Go on, dear, or you 'll miss the train." And Anne began to collect her papers and put away her precious first efforts, which she was, truth to tell, so proud of that she decided to defer the "heart book" and stick to the story of Eleanor.

Mildred needed no second bidding to go, and her light feet paused only a moment in her mother's doorway as she called good-by into the darkened room.

Anne dressed carefully, anxious that Mildred should be pleased with her. Her thoughts shifted from her story to her talk with her mother. It must be hard to

be old and not very strong and constitutionally unhappy. Yet Mrs. Carew was not really old, and Anne could not help feeling that life could be much fuller and happier for them both if her mother were different. Mrs. Carew had begged life for a penny, and a penny was all she had got. Anne made her voice purposely bright and cheerful as she sought her mother a little later.

"Chips will be here in fifteen minutes. What can I do for you?" There was not much to do, it appeared, after Mrs. Carew had sat on the edge of the bed and deliberated sleepily for a full minute. But what with finding the mate to a pair of shoes that had been taken off in the living-room, and sewing a bit of lace in the neck of a dress proved not to be the desired article of wearing apparel after all, and going down to the bottom of a pile of handkerchiefs for the one Aunt Hannah made the Christmas before she died, Anne was unable to be down-stairs when Mildred drew up at the door with a flourish. So Anne's first glimpse of her uncompleted hero was the one she had of him while she descended the stairs to meet the two young arrivals.

Anne's unprejudiced gaze took in a tall, slender, tow-haired person, who turned a cold, blue eye upon her as she greeted him. "A Chippendale eye," Anne murmured to herself as she held out her hand. He finished removing a pair of lemon-colored kid gloves and then bent suavely over the hand. Just then the professor appeared at the front door, very grimy from recent labors upon his baffling automobile. His soft, indeterminate-colored hair was standing nearly erect from his impatient efforts to keep it out of his eyes; his spectacles were gone, and a most artistic smooch wandered down

his left cheek. Anne was amazed more at the youthfulness of his appearance than at the grease and oil that so plentifully bedecked him. He looked a trifle startled as he entered the hall, but when Chips turned to face him and Mildred, rather chagrined at her staid boarder, introduced the two, the professor was quite equal to the occasion.

"You have caught me in a most admired disorder," he quoted blandly, but Anne felt sure that no detail of Chippendale Hall's person escaped him. Mr. Hall evinced a polite willingness to shake hands, but became obviously embarrassed at the state of the professor's proffered hand.

Then Mildred took her guest into the sitting-room while Anne lingered a moment with a new feeling of comradeship for this disreputable person who now stood twinkling boyishly at her.

"You did n't take me into your confidence," he said. It was as if with his disreputable clothes he had put on a new manner.

She smiled back at him, but her eyes were troubled as they sought the sitting-room again.

"I trust this is not to be my future brother-in-law," she whispered.

"Miss Carew," he replied deliberately, "the reasons why a woman chooses and pursues a man will always be a mystery."

"But she does n't," gasped Anne, loyal not only to Mildred, but to her sex.

"Chooses and pursues," repeated the professor, with solemn emphasis, as he clumped up-stairs to change his clothes.

CHAPTER XX

CHIPS had gone. Mildred had shaken hands with him at the door, a lingering handshake, which still thrilled her as she recalled it, and then she had seen him drive away with John into the soft, spring darkness. After that she had pretended to busy herself with picking up a few papers and books in the living-room. Everything reminded her of Chips, and she moved absently about the room. Anne glanced at the professor and caught him looking back at the same moment. She smiled and then felt like a conspirator, for Mildred had turned upon them. Mildred had been blind to her guest's silly attempts to patronize Dr. Bernays, even after he came down-stairs invested in his accustomed dignity, his brown eyes looking out mildly at Chips through tortoise-rimmed spectacles. She had been blind, too, to the youth's rather ridiculous endeavors to be agreeable when he found both Anne and the professor more than a match for him. In Mildred's eyes Chips was the most distinguished man in the world, and in Mildred's ears the last words that Chips had said to her were of more importance than anything that any one in the room could ever say. The only sound worth listening to now was the sound of wheels as the old democrat clattered down into the valley, carrying Chips away from her. Nevertheless, she craved their approval of her hero, and the jealousy of her love told her that they were entirely unsympathetic.

"You don't like him," she challenged. The last sound of the wagon had faded into indistinctness, and through the open window by which Mildred stood the soft blackness of the cloudy night looked in.

Chippendale Hall and his chilly air of superiority, his youthful snobbishness, and his absurd manner of patronizing possession toward Mildred—Chips had come in for his scene and gone out again, Anne reflected. He was the unconsciously comic element. But the comedy disappeared as she looked again at Mildred, grown more womanly of late, her face touched into a new kind of beauty by the happiness that had been sent her. She in her turn seemed to sense the cool amusement of the other two, for she flushed under their eyes. The professor's disapproval she did not mind, but Anne's cut her to the quick.

"You don't like him?" she repeated.

Anne shook her head without answering, but the professor was not so tactful. He volunteered conversationally:

"He is a Chippendale, you tell me. He seemed to think it quite a family. Are all Chippendales so funny?"

"Funny?" Mildred's echo should have warned him. It was freezing in its contempt. She turned a face of withering scorn upon the serious, spectacled questioner. He was looking at her interrogatively, tapping his nose with a pencil, quite unaware of what he had done, if one was to judge by the innocence of his expression.

"*You* think him funny? *You?*"

He gazed back at her for a second, the interrogation fading from his face while another expression took its

place. She did not see the puzzled look in his eyes, for she had turned and fled from the room.

Now the professor may have lacked tact, but he was a gentleman for all that. Something in the girl's contempt had stirred him to unaccustomed emotion. He turned to Anne, who was looking after Mildred with an expression that he could not understand.

"Am I as bad as that?" he asked her gently.

She looked at him then, seeming to take him in slowly as if for the first time; the tall, lean frame, the well-shaped head, the hair growing far back from the high forehead, the keen eyes in the grave and friendly face. If Anne thought to herself that he had a fascination that Chippendale Hall would never possess, she did not say so, but for the first time they looked deeply into each other's eyes, and then each looked quickly away again, but Anne, woman-like, spoke first.

"Mildred is very young."

"I should n't have asked you a question like that," he said humbly. He was aware of a great and growing discontent with things as they were. He was disgusted with Chips, disappointed in Mildred, and displeased with himself. And through all these emotions ran a certain bewildered surprise that he should allow mere acquaintances like the Carews and their friends to interfere with his usual calm tolerance of whatever did not concern him.

Anne was putting to rights the books and magazines on the center table. He watched her moodily for a minute or two and then he spoke.

"Family life would not agree with me," he announced unexpectedly.

Anne looked up in surprise, an open book in one hand, a magazine in the other.

"Perhaps you mean other people's family life," she said quizzically.

"I mean having to spend my days with people who would trespass on my personal rights, question my actions, argue over my opinions, even venture to demand what I was thinking about if I happened to be so unwise as to meditate in public."

"Are you recommending a monastery?" Anne inquired soberly, but she busied herself in making the piles of magazines very precise.

"At least there would be respect there for the personality of each of the inmates."

"I really believe you are offended with my little sister." Anne's tone was rather more displeased with Mildred than with him, but he could not know that.

"Oh, no, I understand the full nature of my offense. Miss Mildred has settled upon young Chippendale Hall. The situation that I have spoken about before has occurred."

"Oh," Anne murmured. "I do recall a peculiar remark of yours."

"Not at all peculiar. It 's the result of years of observation. Bernard Shaw deals with it most cleverly in a lively diatribe."

Anne was amused and a little piqued.

"And the moral of this?"

"Stand not in the way of Miss Mildred's pursuit unless you wish to be hewn down."

He seemed to be cynical and yet he was laughing behind his glasses.

"You can't take much pleasure in women's society,

then." Anne's rejoinder was flippant. "How can you ever feel safe from pursuit?"

"Oh, not I. I am only regarded as a sounding-board. I don't trouble them even with my ideas."

"You are thinking of the people in Maryland. You have been different here!"

"Have I?" He appeared to pause. "That 's curious."

"You talked to me this very afternoon," she ventured.

"Oh, yes, you." He evidently did not mean to be uncomplimentary, but she held the remark up against him until some future time when she could pay him back.

"Well," she said airily. "I am going back to my book. I 'm writing one, you know."

"Really? Since this afternoon?"

"Wait till it is finished before you condemn it. I even have my hero all picked out."

"Some tall, languishing chap with a cleft chin and a talent for always appearing at his best?"

"Wait and see."

"May I have the humble pleasure of seeing your work before it is sent away never to return?"

"I appoint you my critic, Dr. Bernays. Good night."

"Oh,"—he looked at her blankly,—"are you going so soon?"

"Yes, it is after ten, and I have had a busy day."

"I forget how busy you are," he answered in self-reproach. "When you weary of your boarder, say so."

"All right, but you need n't pack to-night." Anne laughed and disappeared.

But when she was safe in the quiet of her own room, she did not sleep. Her mind flitted continuously from the scenes with Mildred to those in which Chips, the disappointing hero, figured, and again to the conversations with Dr. Bernays. Again she went over the last conversation in the sitting-room and Mildred's show of temper. She could not take her little sister's point of view. Chips was ridiculous, and any one who idealized him deserved to have the truth told bluntly. Only a love-sick girl would make fun of a man like Arthur Bernays to pay off a petty score for Chips. No more indulgent sympathy for Mildred after this. People were certainly absurd when they were in love.

CHAPTER XXI

ANNE could hardly wait till after breakfast the next morning to get to her writing. She was still in the mood of the day before and in such a mood it was easier to write a cool and clever satire than to truthfully interpret her characters. In some way that she did not try to explain even to herself, she found it not only a relief, but rather good fun, to turn upon her characters the cold, white light of deliberate ridicule, to uncover their foolish desires and hidden vanities, and hold them up to a quietly ironical inspection. Clever phrases seemed to crowd for recognition; in a lightning flash a word picture would reveal itself for her purpose, and she wrote on and on, smiling now and then at her own conceit, but taking a strange pleasure in the story growing under her pen. She read part of it aloud after she had finished almost a dozen pages, and so swiftly had she written it under the spur of her inspiration that it sounded almost new to her own ear. Now and then she came upon a passage that struck her a-tingle with enthusiasm; again she crossed off whole paragraphs, which seemed to be weak or lacking in that keen humor which Anne had not known before that she possessed. Through one whole page Anne drew a scornful blue pencil, saying to herself: "That is the real Anne Carew. We 'll leave it out."

But who the new Anne might be, from whose pen the story had run off with such merciless abandon,

Anne did not try to discover. At the end of her rereading, she was amazed to find it nearly dinner-time. She was tired now, and in the striking of the clock there was an unwelcome reminder of everyday work.

As she gathered her manuscripts together Mildred appeared at the door.

"Well, I wondered where you were. Did you forget that it was Saturday morning?"

"Oh, no; but there was n't a great deal to do to-day, so I wrote instead."

"I should think you did." Mildred viewed the papers curiously. "Well, I supposed you were still mad at what I said to the professor last night, but I was n't exactly delighted to do all the work myself just because I called the poor old doctor funny. He *is* funny, and I think what he said about Chips was as rude as it could be. What business is it of his who comes to see me?"

Anne brushed her hair out of her eyes and looked up at Mildred a little blankly. Her eyes were tired; her brain was still dwelling upon her story heroine rather than upon the real one standing before her, and she somehow failed to grasp the fact that, instead of cooling down since the day before, Mildred had nursed her grievance in the solitude of her morning's work and was ready for a fresh attack upon any detractor of Chips's.

"Forget about that silly remark and everything will be all right," Anne suggested, with a calm that was peculiarly irritating to her younger sister.

"Well, you need n't sit there and gaze back at me with such a glassy stare. I 'm really and truly cross, and I think you, of all people, might stand up for me.

Have you been writing some more of those stories for the syndicate and is that why you can't even talk like yourself?''

''No,'' answered Anne, slowly, looking down at her manuscript as if it were some alien thing that had strayed her way, ''I have been doing a real story this time, but it does n't sound a bit like me. I am inclined to think it 's pretty good.''

Mildred took up a page at random and stood reading while Anne watched her face with an interest more languid than eager. She hardly expected Mildred to like it. She did not even resent the fact that the girl had no apparent intention of reading it carefully. Mildred merely leafed it over, giving tolerant attention to certain paragraphs that attracted the eye, until she began to read with care, standing perfectly still by Anne's desk. A hasty glance at the page revealed the paragraph to Anne, and she began to wonder what Mildred would say to it.

'' 'As he stood there at the door, waiting for the mother of his fiancée, he drew on a pair of lemon-colored gloves, smoothing them down with the same precision that he exhibited toward anything worthy of his attention. He knew that, while the occasion did not actually demand lemon-colored kids, nevertheless Mrs. Kennard was the type of woman who was impressed by just that sort of thing. Ordinarily he would not have taken the trouble to impress her, but to-night he felt that the endeavor would bring him a suitable reward.' ''

Mildred's face was like a peony as she glanced down the page. ''Why the paragraph about the lemon-colored kids?'' she asked in a freezing tone.

''It does seem a little overdrawn,'' Anne answered

frankly, "but you see if there is some experience that suggest a thing like that, then you can make up your own interpretation of the person's character." But Mildred did not answer. She turned to the next page, and then in a peculiar voice began to read aloud.

"'As Eleanor herself came down the narrow, ugly stairs, he thought of many things. He saw her descending the great curving staircase in his own ancestral home, and he squirmed inwardly in the grasp of a horrible fear that she would not be worthy of the staircase. But instantly he regained his assurance. She was his choice, and his judgment could not err.'"

By this time Anne saw that no explanation would suffice. She could never explain that Chips was only the initial suggestion for that paragraph and that all the rest came only as her own ideas concerning an imaginary "Peregrine Saltonstall."

Mildred laid down the manuscript and turned a dangerously quiet face upon Anne.

"I suppose I am to send for Mr. Hall again when you are ready for another chapter?"

Anne got up at once and put an arm about the girl's unyielding form.

"I must tell you about this, dear," she said soothingly. "I really and truly was n't making fun of the real Chips as you know him, but he gave me just enough in the way of ideas—"

"Anne, I can't write like that. I suppose it 's clever, and I hope you get lots of money from it, but I tell you right now that I 'll never forgive you."

"But it is n't Chips," reiterated Anne. She began to be struck by a cold doubt regarding her own story.

"No," said Mildred, with deliberation, "it is n't

Chips, but you think it is. I don't know what else you have done in this story," she added scathingly, "but I doubt if they would recognize him from this."

"They would never recognize any one. The story is all imagination," Anne put in, forgetting that she had had no imagination the day before. "If it had not been for the lemon-colored kid gloves," she went on unhappily, "you would never have given it a second thought."

"It 's just because it 's the way you felt about him all the evening, in spite of your politeness. I knew it. I even saw you and Dr. Bernays look at each other once, and I hated him for it, but I could n't believe you 'd do it purposely." Here Mildred's voice slipped a little. "You have always seemed to understand things, Anne, and I—I—it does n't seem like you to be so hard."

"The story is n't like me either," Anne confessed frankly. She was touched by Mildred's softened tone and honestly wanted to make reparation. "Shall I burn it?"

"Burn it? Of course not." Mildred did not hesitate. "You don't see now why I feel the way I do. What do I care for the story? Nobody will know it 's meant for Chips, you say. It 's just that I can't bear to have you think of him—and of us—that way."

"Mildred, how can you really care about him in this short time?"

Mildred pulled away and stood proudly at the door, but her lip quivered. "I told you once that I should take whoever I liked, and you need n't try to advise. I meant it then and I mean it now. And after this I shan't even confide in you."

Anne came forward with a little pleading gesture. The story had lost its charm for her.

"Forgive me, dearest, and I 'll never write that way again. I know just how you feel about my writing it in the first place; it 's only that I don't think Chips is—"

"There it is again. I don't care what you think, Anne. You are not going to make me listen after you 've sat up here making fun of him all the morning."

Anne's quiet temper suddenly took fire.

"If I had written the ordinary kind of love story and put in a man full of virtues, with never a fault, and told you the man was Chips, I think you would have believed it."

"No. I should have known you were writing about the professor then," Mildred retorted, and ran downstairs.

CHAPTER XXII

IT was June. One glance into the Carew sitting-room would have told the fact to any one initiated into the mysteries of graduation. On one chair stood a pair of dainty white slippers, Mildred's latest and most elegant purchase; over the back of another hung a cloudy mass of soft white stuff, and in the center of the room Mildred herself, with intently frowning brow, stood turning slowly about for Anne, who pinned something up in one place, and draped something over in another, until both were quite satisfied at the picture that the long glass gave back.

Mildred had bloomed wonderfully in the last few months. She was easily the prettiest girl in her class, but her head had not been turned by the class elections, which had pronounced her not only the prettiest, but the wittiest, and she had run a close second to Tim Murphy for the honor of class "cut up."

Mrs. Carew, ailing for almost a month and still weak from an attack of pleurisy, had turned her head wearily upon her pillow and said in the old querulous voice which was almost too much for Anne sometimes:

"Class 'cut up.' Well, I 'm sure I don't know what that is, but it don't sound like any daughter of mine."

Mrs. Carew was better now and had come down-stairs the week before, urged to all possible effort by the good news that Myrtle and Edward were coming home at last. Edward was to be at the Hammerton hospital, and Myrtle wished to live at home.

Mildred studied her gown in the glass and then let her eyes wander to Anne's face, close beside her own reflected one.

"The dress is a darling, and I expect Chips will think I got it in New York. Anne, you are a wonder. The thinner you get, the prettier you are. Why, I look disgustingly red and healthy beside you."

Anne gave a quick little gesture, almost of impatience, and stooped to collect the bits of lace and muslin that littered the floor.

"Take the dress off, Milly," she said wearily, "and don't talk of Chips any more than you can help."

"Anne, you are tired to death." Mildred stepped out of the white dress and put both cool, bare arms about her sister's neck. "You need a rest, and to get rid of all of us."

"Hush, you will have Edward's medical eyes upon me if you say any more. And Myrtle is in the kitchen and will surely hear."

"No, she won't. She 's gone up-stairs with mother, and as for Edward's noticing you, he has already. Why, they 've only been here a day, and he has asked me three times if you have said anything about not feeling well and if you have a good appetite."

Anne's face flushed and her eyes filled with unexpected tears.

"Mildred, I hate to be discussed. Please remember that, when Edward is asking about me. I feel very well."

"It did n't do any good, mother's asking Dr. Bernays to go up to Belinda's to board. He would have helped more than he hindered, and I 've missed having him around." Anne paid no attention to this last remark.

She folded the dress and stopped at the door with the gown on her arm.

"Get dressed now, Milly, and then help me plan the supper, for it must be early to-night since graduation begins at eight, and I must go up-town this afternoon."

"Anne, you can't walk all the way up there, and Myrtle has sent John to the junction for some of her trunks."

"The walk will do me good. I really have to go, Milly, so don't let 's argue." There was a new assertive note in Anne's voice that troubled Mildred. Anne went on hurriedly, still standing at the door: "We can have cucumber salad to-night and some of the cold meat that was left from dinner. You fix the potatoes early and prepare the salad in case I happen to be late. I have so many things to do."

"Oh, Anne, it 's all nonsense your thinking you 've got to go to New York just because of that foolish thing Myrtle said last night. She is n't well and she does n't think how things sound. She just meant that she expected to run the house while she was here, and if you and I wanted to be guests it would be all the more fun for us. I 'd let her get supper to-night and see how the guest idea works out."

"Oh, Mildred, what 's the use? Myrtle has n't any intention of getting meals. We should just run into trouble."

"Well, I wish Chips would take me to Boston forever and a day! If you go to New York all because Genevieve happened to write of a good position just at this time when you 've got the idea you are n't wanted, then I might as well start out too."

"Mildred dearest, I 'll send for you the minute I get

settled if this library offer promises well and if you think you could be contented."

"Wait till you feel better, Anne, before you take me in charge. You 've lost about four weeks of sleep since mother was ill, and if you had me on your mind, too, you 'd never get well."

"I have you on my mind now, dear," Anne said, coming back into the room, forgetful of her hurry. "You don't confide in me any more."

"Nothing to tell you, honey." Mildred's tone was careless as she turned from the glass after adjusting the red scarf under her white sailor collar.

"And I suppose you don't know whether you are to see Chips to-night or not?"

"If you talk about a thing, it is n't so apt to come true." Mildred gave Anne a loving little pat and passed her in the doorway, so that Anne had no choice but to turn toward her own room and get ready to go up-town. She tried to look her best, for a remark of Myrtle's about an old maid sister was still in her mind, although she would not let it rankle. Ever since Myrtle's arrival Anne had found herself becoming more positive, more inclined to insist upon what she wanted done, for the simple reason that Myrtle had a way of ignoring the very existence of the passive person, and Anne was not philosopher enough to bear being ignored. She would not acknowledge that she was tired, but she knew that the world no longer seemed a friendly place. She found it easier to be brave and cheerful when she was aware of being well dressed and of looking her best. In fact, when she was ready to go up to the Center she smiled at herself in the glass and realized that, as long as her face looked back at her as it did

to-day, Myrtle's remarks concerning old maids would not trouble her very much. Anne had no fear of spinsterhood, but she had a most wholesome fear of looking the part.

On her dresser was a long, thick envelope, and she knew that her mother's eyes rested curiously on it when she went in to say good-by to her, but Anne did not explain.

"Have a long nap and be fresh for to-night," she said, smiling. "It 's good to have you better again."

"Yes, I feel fine now. You go ask Myrtle if she does n't want you to get those things up-town for her that she spoke of yesterday. Have you written Genevieve?"

"Yes, don't you think it 's better, mother?"

"Well, I suppose a mother has to get used to losing first one daughter and then another. They say more than one family can't live in a house, but I never believed that, and if you want to stay, you 'll find that everything will go as smooth as it did before Myrtle was married."

"Surely it would; only I think I 'll take a little flight from the nest now I have a chance."

Anne stooped and put her cool lips against her mother's cheek.

"What will you do if I live with Myrtle if she decides later to settle in Hammerton?"

"Hold down the old farm with Mildred, I suppose."

If Anne's voice trembled, Mrs. Carew did not notice it.

"Well, I 'm sure it is a surprise to have Myrtle and Edward right here under this roof."

"A surprise indeed!" Anne said as she went slowly

down the stairs and out into the hot June sunlight. Her hat was large and shaded her face, but she disliked the walk through the dust with her spotless shoes and fresh white dress.

However, the envelope in her hand must be mailed that day, and she wanted Dr. Bernays to see it first. Somehow the venture would seem pleasanter and safer if he approved. And she wanted to tell him that Edward and Myrtle had come, lest he think it strange that they did not ask him back to board. What would he say when he heard that she was going to New York so soon? Her thoughts were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Cy, turning into the highway from the Salt road.

"Well, say! If I could be allowed to give a lift to such a fine lookin' gal, I 'd take her up-town in ten minutes," he began. Anne smiled up at him gratefully.

"Please do it, then, for I really did n't want to walk at all."

"Where you goin'?" he asked her, with true Whittredge directness, as he slapped fat Calico on the back.

"Oh, just shopping," she answered, tucking her white skirts about her carefully. Then her eyes fell upon her envelope. "But I 'll get out at Belinda Meekins's first," she said.

"Goin' to see the professor?" he asked her, with a chuckle. "Say, I never see sech a change in a man in a little while. Why, he ain't the same grouchy feller he used to be. He come in the post-office the other day just as Mary Anne discovered a letter for you that did n't get sent down last winter. We are pretty particular with regular mail, but things that get posted in

town we don't always get out so prompt, somehow. They aren't stamped at the same time as the rest, and they really are a pesky nuisance. Well, here was this letter. First time we 'd made a mistake like that for a year, and we was feelin' sorry, and hopin' it had n't put you out none, when in come Dr. Bernays and he heard us talkin' about that letter. Come to find out, he wrote it hisself, and he just laffed and said: 'Never mind. Keep it for a souvernir of the service.' He wa'n't a bit put out."

"So that 's where the letter was," Anne observed. And then, womanlike, she wondered what he wrote.

She was still wondering when they reached Belinda's neat white house.

"Guess I 've got the letter here," Cy said, fumbling in his pocket as he stopped the horse. "Yes, here she is. Don't suppose there 's anything in it needs an answer."

"I hope not," laughed the girl. "Thank you, Cy." She turned up the nasturtium-bordered walk, tearing open the envelope as she waited at the door to be admitted.

CHAPTER XXIII

"WELL, well, Miss Carew. This is a pleasure." Dr. Bernays stood in the doorway of Belinda Meekins's shadowy little parlor, and smiled a cordial welcome upon Anne. "I have missed you and your sister a great deal since I was obliged to leave you all, although,"—he had a mind for Belinda's listening ear, —"I am very well taken care of up here. How is your mother now?"

"She is better," said Anne. Despite the languid warmth of the summer afternoon, she was unusually vivid and alert. Her broad-brimmed, rose-colored hat puzzled the professor by a certain self-assertiveness that seemed unlike Anne. Her dress, too, was of a smart crispness equally impressive, and her voice had a ring of decision that seemed to invite opposition.

"Mother sent her regards. She still regrets your having to leave. I didn't come to call, naturally." She ignored his downcast expression, but she found his simplicity in regard to conventions rather refreshing, until she reflected that he might be only showing his conceit. "Choose and pursues," Anne reminded herself grimly. Aloud, she went on: "This is the story. It's the further adventures of Peregrine Saltonstall, but they aren't in the least connected, so this is just as eligible for the contest."

"How much time have I to look at it?" The professor's eyes rested on the manuscript in his hand, but

longer on Anne, so crisp and businesslike, standing before him.

"It 's due in New York in three days if it is to be in before the contest closes. You won't have time to mull over it."

"Just what am I to do to it, then, besides put it in the mail-box?" he inquired a little testily. But he still looked at Anne, and his eyes were not in the least testy, but showed quite the ordinary appreciation of rose-colored hats and immaculate new frocks.

"I thought perhaps you could read it and still retain strength enough to mail it. It really is n't such a bad story, after all. And the characters are true to life, if nothing else."

"What will you do with the thousand dollars you are to receive?" he asked blandly; then he recollected himself and added, "Won't you sit down?"

"The money has n't yet begun to trouble me, but I 'm going across the street to buy some things that it can help me pay for, so I can't sit down."

The professor was aware of a distinct feeling of disappointment. For some reason he had wanted Anne to stay longer. On her part she was already embarrassed that she had gone so far as to call at the Meekins's and leave the manuscript for him. She had talked with Belinda for a diplomatic half hour before she had braved the conventions of Bantam Hill sufficiently to ask to see Dr. Bernays.

Now as she made a move toward the door, which Belinda had left discreetly ajar, she was aware that the professor was picking up his hat from a table close by.

"I still leave my things around anywhere," he re-

marked pleasantly, but he did not ask her permission to walk with her. He took it for granted, with his characteristic indifference to all formality.

"We miss you very much," Anne answered frankly as they went down the front steps of his boarding-house and passed before the interested eye of Cy Whittredge, who was just then loading provisions on his delivery wagon.

"I am glad," he answered simply. "I shall be through here in a little while if all goes well. Although I am not sure but there will be an additional report from the special farm investigation. At all events I expect to take a vacation till fall."

"Where will you go? Back to Maryland?"

He looked unusually sober.

"I don't know," he said after a little hesitation. "I shall go back there eventually, but my leave of absence doesn't expire till next January."

"Oh, I mean just to see Lucille."

"Yes, I know." There was a restraint about the mention of Lucille, which Anne did not probe. He went on talking about himself as if he was sure of her interest. "Do you know I think I am well enough at last to do anything I like. That means a great many things: travel, teaching in some big university, doing research work." He paused and Anne broke in enthusiastically:

"Oh, I am so glad. You haven't any idea how glad I am. That place was never big enough for you."

"Any place is too big for us in many ways," he said gravely.

She seemed suddenly impatient, and he saw that she did not care to moralize.

"You 'll think Bantam Hill is too big for *me* when

you read what I 've done to it.'' She threw him a swift glance from under the brim of her hat as they turned in at the little department store next door to Cy Whittredge's.

He made no answer, but he watched her, frowning a little, while she busied herself with several complicated purchases. She still had the nervous quickness of manner that he had noted first at Mrs. Meekins's. She was so undeniably pretty with it all that he found it hard to keep from looking at her. She turned to him unexpectedly as he leaned up against the ribbon-counter near where he stood. ''You have courage to come shopping with a woman. It may take forever.''

''I was just wondering why I was here,'' he answered so candidly that she looked straight at him and laughed. ''My sister Myrtle and her husband have quite unexpectedly come to live with us, and I 'm going to New York almost as soon as my story; so there are a number of things to do in a very little while. If I could run your car, I should go to Hammerton every day for a week.''

''You may have me and the car, too, Miss Carew,'' he hastily put in, getting the order of his offering arranged so awkwardly that he scowled at his own stupidity and succeeded in looking very fierce indeed.

''Thank you,'' said Anne breathlessly. ''I may remind you of that if anything special comes up. Edward will soon have a car of his own here. He is to be superintendent of the new Hammerton hospital. We are all so pleased.''

''Yes,'' he replied in tone so dry that Anne looked up quickly from the pocket-book she was just opening. He said no more, however, until old Miss Print had

taken Anne's bill and tottered off to change it. "You must be pleased when you rush straight off to New York in the worst heat of the season."

Anne received her change silently and put it into her little beaded purse. When they were out on the street, she said brightly:

"It doesn't look very well to be running off like this, does it, but you see, the position I want in the library can't wait till fall."

"How does your mother feel?" He bent quite low to see her face, unaware of the interested eyes of Miss Print, peering from the front window, and the fixed gaze of Mrs. Clarke of Wiggin and Clarke's Fancy Notions.

"Mother?" Anne gave a little laugh. "Oh, mother is always delighted to have Myrtle at home. As for Mildred,"—Anne's tone faded imperceptibly into a kind of colorless apathy,—"I can't know whether I should leave her, but I can do her no good by staying."

He waited, but she did not go on.

"You are troubled about her?" he asked gently.

"Oh, yes, yes!" She seemed to find relief in talking to him. "We are disagreeing for the first time since she was a baby."

If the professor noticed that Anne was telling him more than she ever had before, he used remarkable wisdom in remaining unmoved. She went on passionately:

"Mildred will break my heart if she insists on being so wilful."

Dr. Bernays recognized the exaggeration, and opened his mouth to say something to recall Anne to her old, well-balanced self, but a glance at the girl's sweet,

troubled face caused him to change his mind and instead of speaking, he helped her very gently over a rough place in the road. He was unused to showing any girl these little social graces, but he had a distinctly pleasurable feeling as he touched Anne's cool, round arm. He drew himself up suddenly and frowned. He did not know that he was frowning at his own inexplicable emotion.

"What are you disagreeing about?" he asked a little stiffly. Anne looked up at him and then bit her lip. His question made her realize how much she had been telling him. But somehow the fact that he did not babble or sympathize made him a very comfortable person to talk to.

"Do you remember Chippendale Hall?" She could not forbear a smile as she spoke the name.

"The Boston scion who honored us once with a call between the dark and the daylight?"

"Exactly. Well, this is the night of Mildred's commencement. We are all coming up here to the Center to the exercises, as you probably know." He did now recall that Mrs. Meekins had mentioned commencement somewhere at some time, but he had not been interested, so he had not listened. Now, however, he pounced upon a conclusion with remarkable acumen.

"And young Chippendale Hall is coming, too?"

"I 'm afraid so." Anne's tone was genuinely worried.

"Well, he could see her just one night, could n't he? Is he so fascinating that he will make her commencement impossible?"

"Please don't jest."

"I assure you I am a layman in these matters, Miss

Carew." She ceased speaking, feeling too vexed to explain herself. As she turned in at the wood road, which was the shortest way home, she said with dignity:

"Don't let me make you late to your supper, Professor Bernays. It must be after six o'clock."

"I had rather walk with you if you have no objection," he answered, so meekly that she stole a look at him, which she hoped he would not observe. "I have hardly seen you since your mother was taken sick," he reminded her.

She could not help feeling flattered at his pleasure in her company. He had never said as much to her before, but the day had been so full since the coming of Myrtle and Edward that morning that this walk necessarily lacked any significance it might otherwise have taken on. Even now she was hurrying to return by supper-time, to help Mildred dress, and come back to the Center again with her mother and sister for a long evening in the hot little hall where the commencement exercises were held. The thought of commencement brought her back to Chips, whose insolent young presence would soon be thrust upon her.

"Why could n't Mildred have fallen in love with some one else?" she burst out desperately.

"You know what I told you that evening when he first came? The reasons are—"

"Oh, I know, I know, what *you* think," she said scornfully.

"You did not agree? Ah, Miss Carew, I know better than you, after all. Have you any idea why Lucille did not come up here with me for the winter?"

"Why, she always said she could n't very well board

here with you and close the house." Anne wondered at his irrelevance.

"Did that convince you? We have scarcely ever been separated before."

"Why, I really did n't think about it."

"Very well, let 's think about it now. Have you heard from her lately?"

"Not so very lately."

"She is engaged."

"Lucille?" Anne stopped short and looked at him incredulously. "Engaged?"

"Yes."

"But to whom?"

"Young Butterfield at the college. History department."

"I can hardly believe it."

"Do you see my point?"

"Your point?"

"If Mildred has decided that she prefers the man you call 'Chips' to anybody else, she will obtain him."

"But Lucille—" Anne's defense was stopped by his instantaneous rejoinder.

"Lucille could not close the house this winter," he reminded her dryly. "She invited Miss Dingledine to stay with her during my absence. The fact that she could suffer the proximity of that woman for three months and a half provided me with my first clue."

"But Lucille will be very happy," said Anne loyally.

"So will your sister, doubtless. One of woman 's most magnificent traits is her ability to stand by her mistakes."

"Professor Bernays."

"What is the matter?"

"Do you remember what Chips was like?"

"Tastes differ, Miss Carew."

"Oh, not to that extent. Why could n't the right man have come along at just that time? Mildred was ready for anything, and Fate sent *Chips.*"

"You are sure that this evening is going to be a cause for worry?" He led her away from her scornful philosophizing.

"Oh, I 'm sure of it," she said wearily.

"You can never depend upon any human being in given circumstances," the professor said wisely. "You will only know the inevitable conclusion."

Anne made an impulsive little gesture down the wooded road that stretched in front of them. The trees met overhead across their path, and the low sun sent a mellow radiance through the pines. A thrush called with haunting wistfulness from a nearby thicket, and the frogs peeped from a pool across the swamp.

"It 's the magic of June," Anne said. "It 's like a conspiracy. Mildred and her pretty new gown and the flowers and all the excitement and poor old Sammy Ellis's band and the dance and a night like this—why, it 's the most inescapable thing in the world."

He remained silent, and she half wished she had not spoken. Ordinarily she would have kept quiet, too, until he saw fit to speak, but she was on tiptoe with excitement, and she felt the press of words that she could not stop.

"Things always get too big for you after a while, and they are going to be too big for me to-day. I know it even now. Nothing that 's worth while pays. There is Lucille! To think she would be like that! Don't

think I 'm calling her unwise. But it was n't quite sincere, was it? And look at my life this winter—it promised so much just because it seemed to me a problem that I had to work out all alone. But of what use am I? Mother is only too glad to have Myrtle back; I am no longer needed, and even Mildred tells me that she will not have me interfering any more."

She stopped short, breathing a little faster than was natural, but otherwise quite herself. It was only her hurrying voice with the new, bitter note in it that the professor found hard to reconcile. He knew that she would be sorry later that she had ever spoken so intensely to him, but he felt powerless to answer or comfort her. He merely walked in silence by her side, down the still wood path and up the hill to the farm-house. At the door she spoke to him rather abruptly.

"I can't ask you in," she said. "We are all in such a hurry. You see the exercises begin at eight."

"I could n't think of stopping," he assured her with dignity. As he turned to leave her, he noticed a stranger, a man, standing on the vine-covered porch. He was tall and broad-shouldered, and even from that distance the professor could see that he was good to look at. That must be the young brother-in-law whom Mrs. Meekins said Anne had "turned down," even though Mrs. Hawkins did insist that he jilted her. He had a pang that he did not understand, as he turned away from the house.

Sounds of laughter and young voices floated to him through its open windows. It had never seemed so alive with human interest. He had lived there many weeks, but he seemed to have no part in it at all—or in anything. Even Lucille— He walked slowly across the

broad yard and out to the road. Anne herself seemed farther away from him despite her confidences. Perhaps she confided in him the more readily because of his very isolation. And in another week she would be in New York.

He did not heed the flying feet behind him. He was deeper in thought than he realized till Anne's voice sounded in his ears. It had never been so welcomingly sweet.

"Professor Bernays, please forgive me," she was saying.

He turned to see a serious, winsome Anne, whose eyes met his with a softness quite new to them. She had taken off the assertive, rose-colored hat, and her hair lay in damp little rings on her forehead.

"I did n't mean to be so thoughtless this afternoon. Please forgive me. I brought you my story to read, and then I told you I did n't care what you thought of it, and I talked about my worries as if you had none of your own. Mildred wants you to come to her commencement to-night, and sent me out with this ticket. Please come."

Now the professor abhorred commencement exercises of any form or kind and he might have been excused for refusing Mildred's tardy invitation and Anne's incoherent petition, but he rose to the occasion with quite unusual courtesy.

"I shall be glad to come," he said as he took the little blue ticket from Anne's hand. And then he added awkwardly: "I am also glad if my listening was of any help this afternoon. I am not a particularly consoling person even when I want to be."

"You are," she interrupted him, eager to make com-

plete amends. Then she added before she left him, "I 'm sorry we can't be more hospitable to-night, but you see our new arrivals have upset us a little. By the way,"—she looked away from him and hurried her words,—"my sister Myrtle seemed quite to approve of Chips although she has never seen him."

"That makes it interesting." His voice was dry.

"Yes, does n't it? I must go now. You will meet us this evening then?"

"I shall be only too glad," Dr. Bernays replied, and his stiff little acceptance was redeemed by the way he looked down on Anne. He, too, seemed aware of the presence of June.

CHAPTER XXIII

AS soon as she left Arthur Bernays, Anne opened the envelope containing the delayed letter. She read the contents hastily and then smiled, but when she looked up her eyes would have reminded him still more of Lucille's pansies. He would never write such a stiff little note now. She crumpled it carelessly and tossed it into the fireplace; then she suddenly stooped and rescued it before she went out to see about the supper.

"Well, Anne, you are a lucky girl," Myrtle began languidly, as she sank into her mother's easy-chair and watched her sisters getting ready for the evening. Myrtle was not so pretty now as she had been. Her face was thinner, and inclined to be petulant when in repose. But she was quite unchanged in manner, and she still insisted upon looking at Anne as the fortunate one of the family.

"Lucky?" Anne echoed with her mouth full of pins. Something had gone wrong with the graduation dress at the last minute.

"Yes, a budding story-writer with nothing to do but read and scribble, and meander around the town with good-looking professors."

"Say," Mildred began as she twisted nervously under Anne's touch. "Did you ever get a close-up of him?"

"Anne, why do you let that child use such atrocious English?" Myrtle forgot her first complaint in her second.

"I really did n't know what she meant." Anne's tone was quite unruffled.

Mildred spread her hands in despair.

"Have n't you ever been to movies? Have n't you ever seen an enlarged picture of the hero come swimming right up till you can count his freckles and his eyelashes? Well, that 's a close-up."

"I 'm sure I don't know when you get a chance to see Dr. Bernays like that," Mrs. Carew objected righteously, and they all laughed.

"Stand out in the middle of the room and turn around," Anne commanded. "Everybody view the effect of the new gown."

Edward came in just in time to hear the last words.

"Fine," he pronounced, rubbing his hands. Anne glanced at him covertly, trying to see, as she had tried many times that day, wherein he was different after these few months, for different he certainly was, in tone, manner, and expression. He was more sure of himself, showing now and then in some little trick of speech or gesture a positiveness so decided that it seemed almost as if he invited contradiction. He talked more, also, but he seemed to lack the easy-going contentment with which he had formerly looked at life. He was more interesting, Anne thought, but it was not till some days later that she found herself wondering if he would be as lovable. Anne did not analyze her feelings toward him. She took it for granted that she felt toward him as she always had, but that they must neither of them think of it or mention it. If she had been forced to explain the events of the past year as she saw them in her heart, she would have said that she had loved Edward enough to marry him if he had not been weak enough to drift toward

Myrtle. At times she had blamed herself for being so passive in the matter, and again she had reasoned that he had never loved her as she wanted to be loved, but throughout the winter Anne had not once paused to wonder if she really loved him, after all. She had shut away the feeling in some far chamber of her heart and had not allowed herself to open the door upon it since. The possibility that she might one day seek it and find it gone had not occurred to her.

Edward obviously preferred going to the exercises and seeing some of his old friends to remaining with Myrtle that evening, but she was tired and insisted that graduations always bored her. She made no reference to his staying, but Anne noticed that he took it as a matter of course that he was to stay and also that he was entitled to grumble about it a little. Anne missed the thing that she had hoped to see, the complete understanding and unspoken tenderness between them that would prove their marriage a happy one.

As Anne stood at her glass a little later, winding a gossamer-like scarf about her head, she looked at herself very critically. She could never remember being so thin, or so tired, and she knew that in the walk from the Center with Dr. Bernays she had surprised even herself by her passionately unhappy outburst. Yet she looked in vain for the fretful lines like the ones that were marring Myrtle's face, and she smiled at herself approvingly when her glass told her that she was prettier than ever. If somebody could have told Anne just then that life was giving her as much as it was taking away perhaps the next few months would have been different, but nobody had ever really comforted or mothered Anne, and

the armor that she wore against the persistent irritations of her daily life was becoming dangerously thin and vulnerable.

Myrtle came out to see the departure of the family.

"You two girls look awfully nice. I hope Mildred's Bostonian will be impressed," she said as Edward helped their mother into the shabby wagon.

"I wish we had an automobile," sighed Mildred.

"Just wait till our car gets here!" Edward said brightly. "Then you will begin to put on airs, I expect. Even the Boston man won't be good enough."

"For goodness' sake, Edward, don't you suppose these girls ever saw an automobile?" Myrtle cried out in exasperation, just as Anne provoked Nellie into a gentle trot. Mrs. Carew, quite resplendent in black lace, shook a reproving finger at Myrtle, and Mildred, carefully enshrouded to protect her finery, waved them a gay good-by from the solitary splendor of the back seat.

Anne tried not to think about Chips, and not to mind the behavior of the cool little lady in the back seat, who had stubbornly refused to listen to the one shy plea that Anne had made. Anne tried something else, too, which she had never stooped to before. She deliberately trapped Mildred into acknowledging that she and Chips had planned to meet at the Center. After this Anne was tensely gay, chattering incessantly on the way up about a story, which, she boasted, would bring her in a thousand dollars and a great name, about her trip to New York, about Lucille's engagement, about Genevieve's plans for good times during Anne's free hours, about anything, in fact, that would occupy the time till the drive was finished. Anne threw her mother into a

spasm of conscientious indignation by asserting that she would open charge accounts in all the stores until she earned the money to pay for what she wanted.

As they neared the old white farm-house in the center of the town where Belinda Meekins's boarder was even then descending the front steps, Anne turned to Mildred with a teasing smile.

"I 'm going to stop and take in the professor, Mildred; so as long as you are in the back seat you can get a close-up of him if you like."

"Now believe me, Anne, he 's not bad at all when he 's dressed up. With eye-glasses, instead of spectacles, he is quite presentable." She understood perfectly Anne's ruse to avoid the possibility of any confidential talk with Chips, but her happiness at his coming quite dulled her resentment toward Anne.

Mildred was right. The professor did look distinguished as he bowed gravely to Mrs. Carew and Anne and took his seat beside Mildred.

"I understand you are the leading lady to-night," he said to her.

"Mrs. Whittredge is settin' on the piazza of the store and she see us take him in," Mrs. Carew murmured to her oldest daughter.

"Good for Mrs. Whittredge. Just wait till she gets her eye on our next passenger," Anne said aloud. It was the first time she had made any open allusion to Chips that day, but how could she help facing the issue squarely at last, when there on the village green, immaculately garbed and gloved, regardless of the warmth of the June night, Chippendale Hall regally awaited the humble approach of the Carew equipage!

He made a great ceremony of greeting Mrs. Carew, and

he paid Anne a graceful little compliment, which she received so grimly that a near approach to a twinkle visited the professor's eyes for the brief space of a second. Then with elegant precision, Chips disposed himself in the back seat, favoring Dr. Bernays with a Chippendale nod, and then addressing himself to Mildred, who tried not to be in a flutter when she thought of the impression he would make on the girls.

Anne could not hear their conversation, but she did not envy the professor. Beneath all her forced merriment she was fighting the bitter pangs of jealousy toward the callow youth who had taken her little sister from her.

She watched Chips as much as she could throughout the exercises, as he sat within easy range of Mildred's adoring eyes. What was the charm for a girl who had always been so sensible? She could not fathom it.

The hall was overcrowded and suffocatingly close; the speaker was a pompous person from the Hammerton board of education, and he proceeded systematically through an orderly series of topics, which all sounded alike after the distinguishing "thirdly" or "fourthly." Chips did not try to hide the fact that he was bored. When the lecturer finished and turned to deliver his last impressive message to the graduates, Anne noticed that young Chippendale Hall sat with closed eyes, his thin, delicately curved nose thrust into the air, his arms folded across his spotless shirt-front.

Dr. Bernays, who had doubtless lived through some two dozen more of these performances than the youth beside him, was profoundly attentive, although Anne recognized the effort he was making. She also knew that he would not have made the same attempt to be courteous three months before. There had been a gradual

change in his attitude toward whatever interested her. But she was sensible enough to realize that in the face of young Hall's insolence he was making a special point of paying excellent attention.

Now he turned toward Anne, and motioning slightly in Chips's direction, he whispered:

"There's a simile, but it escapes me. He isn't really so much like a clam as—I can't place him, but I hope to soon."

Anne did not answer, but she bent an amused face over her program and no longer marveled at Dr. Bernays' absorption.

The young people were eager for the dance, and before the last diploma was given out a few ardent spirits in the front of the room had begun to move chairs away as soon as they were vacated.

"Do you dance?" Chips inquired politely of Dr. Bernays. "The toddle is one of the latest."

"Good heavens, no!" hurriedly exclaimed the professor, and Anne laughed. He looked at her instantly. "I can dance a little something that they used to call a waltz," he told her in an apologetic voice, but he looked so worried at the prospect that she hastened to reassure him.

"You aren't required to to-night. Mildred is sufficiently flattered that you came to see her graduate."

So Anne and the professor remained decorously by the wall till Anne was claimed by some of her friends, and then he sat alone, watching the dancers, but quite unaware of the fact that he watched one couple and one only till Anne returned to his side. He considered her the most beautiful girl in the room, but he was troubled by no personal element in his admiration, for he sup-

posed that everybody felt exactly as he did. More important than her looks, however, in his opinion, was the attraction that he labeled "mental." He had unlimited faith in Anne's future, and he was greatly pleased at being chosen as the critic for her stories. But the memory of the last story he had read just before coming to the hall troubled him not a little, and to avoid thinking too much about it, he fell to watching Chips and speculating a little on how far the romance might go, despite Anne's anxious surveillance. As Chips passed them on his buoyant way down the hall, Dr. Bernays turned to Anne triumphantly.

"I have it. It is not a clam; it is Alice's Mock Turtle."

Anne's eyes danced, but she bent instantly toward her mother to hear her inveterate, "What did he say, Anne?"

"We were talking about Chips, mother. Don't you think he 's rather funny?"

"Yes, I do," Mrs. Carew agreed unexpectedly. "I wish he 'd stop holding Mildred so tight. I don't like it."

"Nor I. Come on, everybody, let 's go home."

"I 'm tired enough," said Mrs. Carew, wearily.

But when Mildred, laughing lightly, floated down to them on Chips's correctly curved arm, Anne hesitated. She shrank from being actually rude to Chips, but she wanted Mildred to come home, and she had no idea when he planned to leave. He had said that he was staying at a fraternity house in Dallastown, not far from Hammerton, and he might not leave Bantam Hill for two hours if he thought there was no hurry.

Dr. Bernays seemed to understand her difficulty, and he came to the rescue.

"Can't we drive your mother home and come back?" he asked so kindly that Mildred flashed him a grateful look of real friendliness, his first since he fell from grace.

"Will you be right here till we come back?" Anne asked Mildred so soberly that everybody, even Mrs. Carew, laughed. Anne's anxiety for her favorite sister was robbing her of all diplomacy.

"Of course, you dragon-eyed chaperon," Mildred answered, but Chips did not trouble himself to promise anything.

"You are certainly good to do this," Anne said gratefully as they jogged out of the old horse sheds in the rear of the town hall. "I suppose I could have come back alone after I had left mother, but the old willow road is n't very enjoyable for lone travelers."

"I want a chance to tell you what I think of old Bole and the rest of your characters," he answered.

"Oh!" Anne stole a glance toward her mother, but she was already preparing to doze on the back seat. "Did you like him?" she asked eagerly.

"Do you want my candid opinion?"

Her voice faltered over her answer. The story was still the dear child of her fancy, and she could not bear to hear it condemned.

"It is remarkably well done," he said deliberately, "and I am very much afraid you will make a success with it."

"Afraid?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind telling me why you don't want me to succeed?"

"I do want you to succeed, Miss Carew, but not by

'base degrees.' Did n't Brutus kill Cæsar, according to Shakespere, because he feared he would use his friends and his country for stepping-stones?''

''And I have done that?''

''Have n't you?''

She did not answer.

He went on relentlessly:

''Who is Bole? Cy Whittredge, or I am very much mistaken. He may never recognize himself. But I do. Who is Peregrine? Our young friend Chips, without a doubt. Even the girl, the little witch Zelda, is Mildred to the life.''

''Then I suppose I am to tear it up?'' Anne spoke flippantly to hide her anxiety as to what his final judgment would be. But her tone did not please him, and he remained silent, half puzzled at the change that seemed to have come over her since he had seen her last.

''So you are to go to New York?'' he finally asked in a different tone.

''As soon as possible. Imagine me trying to become an authority in archæology something or other.''

''I am glad it is a library position. You ought not to teach for a while.''

Anne turned to him in surprise.

''Why not?''

''You are n't enough of a philosopher. You have been taking things too hard lately.''

Her lips quivered, but he could not know that, for her voice was quite cool as she said,

''A man who can make the remarks you did about family life being altogether too much for him should not criticize any one else's management of the problem.''

He was frankly surprised at her words. They sounded sharper than Anne had intended, but she was hurt at his criticism of her, and deeply troubled about the story of which she had hoped he would approve. And further back in her mind was the constant irritation of Myrtle's ungracious presence at the farm, of Edward placed at last on a dangerously intimate footing, and the worry which was always with her for the youngest sister, who would no longer listen to any one but Chips.

"I think life is hard," said Anne.

He could not tell her that she had shown him how to make it easy and pleasant, that he had admired her always for the thing which she now seemed to have lost. He wanted to find words to explain what her tender unselfishness at the old farm had meant to him, but he could not speak to her of what was in his mind without saying more than he had ever cared to say to any girl. He was saved an answer by the sudden question of Mrs. Carew, who had been dozing in the back seat.

"Ain't we 'most there?"

Nellie jolted heedlessly around the last curve as Anne answered in a flat, unnatural voice,

"Yes, Mother, I think we are."

"Well, I 'm sure I 'm much obliged to you, Professor," Mrs. Carew continued politely.

He did not look at Anne as he said in a formal voice that it had been a pleasure, but he helped Mrs. Carew out carefully and took her to the door.

Myrtle was standing there, with a lighted lamp in her hand, for she had heard the carriage drive into the yard. Her fair, fretful face was thrown into high relief in the yellow light, and her hair drooped in disorderly fashion about her ears, for she had been lying down. She smiled

winningly as her mother introduced Dr. Bernays, and he saw then a likeness to Anne, but he did not think of Myrtle as beautiful.

As he went back to the waiting carriage and swung himself in beside Anne, her sweet, tired face struck him with a sharp sense of contrast to Myrtle's self-satisfied plumpness.

Anne could not explain her feelings as they turned Nellie's patient head toward town, but she knew that she was glad to be driving with Arthur Bernays in the still June night, and for a moment she almost wished that they did not need to go back to the town, and that she need never see Chippendale Hall again.

He seemed to have nothing to say, and they drove in silence through the lilac-scented gloom.

When he did speak it was about something very far from her thoughts.

"Did you ever travel, Miss Carew?"

"A little, but probably not what you would call traveling. I spent one summer on the St. Lawrence with the friend whom I am going to see in New York, and I stayed a week in Chicago once. It probably seems a pathetic inventory to you, for Lucille says you have been everywhere."

"Yes, in search of health," he answered rather shortly, but his tone changed in an instant, for he added, "And I am finding it. Just being out-of-doors is after all the best remedy I know."

"I am so glad you are feeling well again. Lucille will be a different girl when she does n't have you to worry about."

"I imagine I don't occupy much of Lucille's thought at present." His tone was gloomy.

Anne laughed, and her laugh reminded him of the old Anne.

"You men are all alike. You always must come first. Now surely you call that selfish?"

"We reserve the right to that attitude. It is our women that we desire perfect." His answer came so quickly that it pleased Anne, although she did not link it with his disappointment in her own behavior that day, for she did not dream how deeply into his friendship he had taken her.

When next he spoke it was less impulsively, but his voice was more earnest than she had ever heard it.

"You must never lose your courage for a moment. It is only selfish people who ask themselves, 'What 's the use?' "

"I 'm not losing courage," she said a little too quickly. "And I have n't a doubt that I am selfish. I am only wondering if it does n't pay to assert yourself."

"It depends on what you have in mind," he answered dryly, for he felt rebuffed. He had never preached to any woman before, and Anne had made him feel suddenly didactic and self-righteous.

"I think I am going to work according to a new creed," she went on.

"I should be delighted to hear the creed," he said. And then unexpectedly Anne said the little poem that she had learned coming from Hammerton.

"I shall walk freely yet,
Who am beset
With burrs and brambles clinging,
And flowers on either hand
Where I stand,

Which I pluck, singing,
And my steep road forget.

"I shall not roam nor stay,
Nor weep nor play
Though beckon tears and laughter;
Dreams and desires may ride
Far and wide,
And bid me follow after,
But I shall go my way."

Anne's voice paused, and as she turned toward him, she saw that he was looking at her and that he was smiling.

"I think you will find that a pretty good creed," he said. "As far as you have gone on your way, you have done just that. Only to-night,"—his voice was full of an indulgent sympathy, which should have shown him that no matter how hard he tried, he would always excuse Anne for everything,—"to-night you thought more of the steep road than anything else."

"Oh, but there are things that you don't understand," she cried. "I am not a very brave person, and there are things that I must leave, in order to forget. You see that is n't all of the creed."

"Does it tell you to go to New York and write?"

He seemed to make light of her earnestness. Her answer rushed to meet him.

"It tells me to turn my back upon what I cannot conquer."

"Ah." It was only a breath, but it showed that he was suddenly set to wondering what she meant. When without warning he finished her quotation for her, she

sat motionless, thinking less of the little poem itself, than of the strangeness of hearing the words in his deep voice, so unaccustomed to tenderness of expression.

"The little loves that bind
I shall leave behind,
Careless of hate or pleading,
No hand shall stay my feet,
However sweet,
I must go on still speeding
My highest height to find."

For a moment there was silence. Arthur Bernays had never before inspired in Anne the feeling that held her now. Without warning the thought came to her that it would be possible for him to fall quite as deeply in love as the more emotional men whom he had always scorned.

"So you, too, know my poem?" she asked him at last.

"Yes; Lucille found it one day and decided that it appealed to her sense of the heroic." Every trace of feeling was obliterated from his voice. He was asking himself if he did not know the reason for Anne's sudden departure from home. Belinda Meekins had not gossiped in vain, after all.

"You are not fair," she said.

"Since your highest aim is something of which I can't approve."

She thought about this until they reached the hall. As she got out she cast a curious little glance at him, but he did not look at her as he helped her to alight.

She stepped inside the dance hall and scanned the couples for Mildred's golden head or the sleek, black and white erectness of his royal highness, Chippendale

Hall, 3d, but neither were to be seen. In growing dismay she looked more carefully, telling herself that she had been foolishly trusting to leave them and expect them to remain with the rest.

After she had satisfied herself that they were gone, she went back to tell the professor, but Mrs. Hawkins intercepted her. Mrs. Hawkins was attired in purple silk and was in a state of heat and excitement that lent more force to her words than they would otherwise have had.

"Well, Anne, I think it 's time you come back. Here 's Mildred gallivantin' off down by Beaver Brook with that young city feller, and Cissie Chambers and my girl way up on Cannon Hill makin' believe watch the moon set! Moon set at this time of the month!" she sniffed. "An' Mr. Hawkins waitin' out in the buggy as calm as if we was all to meetin'!"

"How long ago did Mildred go out?" Anne could hardly control her voice. Her knees were trembling curiously, just as they used to when she and Myrtle got up at night, long years before, to look for burglars.

"Oh, they went out a little spell after you did. Because Belinda, she says to me, 'Well, my boarder has gone off with one of the Carew girls, and I guess, by the looks of him, that Beelzebub himself is takin' off the other.' "

Anne turned and fled from Mrs. Hawkins's well-meant loquacity. She found that the professor had disappeared, but farther down the road she could just discern the familiar red lantern bobbing dimly in the moonlight as Nellie and her driver departed on some unexplained errand. Anne laughed hysterically as she realized that she was stranded high and dry, without explana-

tion of any sort. But as she watched the little red lantern, she began to see that it was stationary. Nellie was apparently standing by the entrance to the wooded path that Anne and the professor had traversed that afternoon. And clear on the soft, still air, far removed from the babble of the dancers behind her, came the sound of the professor's shrill whistle, repeated twice.

In a moment she saw a flash of white and heard a distant laugh. Two figures emerged from the path through the pines just where it turned into the highway, and Anne caught her breath as she saw the man's head bent for a moment and the sudden stillness of the slender, white figure. Then the two separated, and Mildred's trill answered Dr. Bernays'. Anne almost sobbed as she ran down to the foot of the walk. Mildred stopped talking and laughing as they drove up to Anne and saw her white, reproachful face.

Anne smiled faintly upon her errant sister and said a short good night to Chips.

After the professor's stiff farewell Anne thought she distinguished a muttered, "Exit the Mock Turtle."

"Will you girls be all right about getting home?" asked Chipps, as he turned suddenly back to them.

"I am driving them home and walking back," announced Dr. Bernays.

Chips smiled patronizingly.

"Oh, I say. You 've had quite a little driving tonight, have n't you?"

"Yes, I prefer it to toddling," drawled the professor.

CHAPTER XXIV

MILDRED expected to be reproached. Anne was sure of this from the defiant tilt of her little sister's chin and the grateful alacrity with which she entered into a discussion of the dance. But Anne was wise at last and said nothing to frighten Mildred farther away from her. She must keep the girl's confidence at all costs. The one question that Anne longed to ask would have enraged Mildred without influencing her. It was, "What *do* you see in him?"

Anne's thought went back to the February day when Mildred had come from the house-party and had whispered her happy little confidence to a sympathetic listener. Now the sympathy was gone, and Mildred sat erect and defiant, watchful for the smallest sign of disapproval, and prepared to defend Chips even at the risk of a quarrel. It had always been that way with Mildred from the time she was a child; the slightest indication of ridicule and she was utterly unmanageable.

One luminous window in the shadowy old farm-house spoke of some one who waited for them to return. It proved to be Edward. He explained that he had told John not to stay up, as he would unharness for the girls when they came, and besides this he proudly brought them a tinkling frost-covered pitcher of lemonade, which he had made ready for them.

"My, but you are an ideal husband!" Mildred de-

clared as she set down her glass only to see him carry it away for her and then come back for Anne's.

Anne smiled at him as she finished drinking, but she was so tired that she hardly knew how wan a smile it was. Edward noticed, however, for he turned away without speaking, only explaining from the kitchen, where he had taken the tumbler, that he was going out to the barn and would lock up when he came in.

Anne climbed the stairs ahead of Mildred, but the younger girl cried out impatiently before they had reached the turn:

"For goodness' sake, Anne, if you are as tired as that, take a nap on the landing."

"I know I 'm slow. But I seem to have spent a good deal of strength on nothing at all to-day." She was thinking of the story she had worked so hard to finish, but she knew it to be only one of a multitude of things.

"My dress was n't 'nothing at all.' It 's a beauty. Just think, Anne, I 'm out of High School at last. I feel about twenty."

Anne looked at her keenly as she waited at the head of the stairs, but Mildred covered her ears, dropped a light kiss on Anne's cheek and fled down the hall to her own room, crying:

"Don't say it, Sister Anne. I don't want to hear it."

"Neither do I," came Myrtle's sleepy voice. "Can't you people be still?"

Anne closed her door quietly, but she bit her lip in irritation. Then without lighting her lamp, she sank into the little rocker by the window and began to laugh, rocking back and forth, and picturing the day which she had just spent. It was borne in upon her that life was excessively funny. She thought of Chips, smug and self-

satisfied, the Mock Turtle, leading Mildred where he willed, shaping her opinions, her utterances, controlling her thoughts, making love to her, doubtless, when there was no one by to see; Mildred with her sense of humor quite dead in her, bewitched by a caricature of a man! She laughed softly to herself as she rocked. She thought of Lucille and she laughed again. How Lucille had abominated Miss Dingledine! Yet for months she had suffered her continual society, refused to travel with her brother, or visit the friends who wanted her, only to remain in sight of young Butterfield, who could hardly take his nose out of a history long enough to see what he was eating for dinner. And she had won him! Her next letter would be a mixture of bliss and apology. Anne laughed again. The very thought of Butterfield and Lucille was so utterly ludicrous.

Then she thought of herself. She had been ready to stop teaching a year ago at this time, but she had served Myrtle's purpose by going away again, while her lover made up his mind without any distracting element to reproach him. Afterwards the poor pawn was moved back, to scrub and sweep and mend while Myrtle went forth with her lover safely captured and nothing on her mind.

The room in which Anne was sitting was almost unbearably hot. Anne remembered then that she had moved into it a year ago because it was the least comfortable room in the farm-house. It was impossible to heat adequately in winter, and it was never cooled by the mountain wind in summer. After she had brooded upon this awhile, the place seemed warmer than ever. Not a breath stirred the curtains, and even the floor beneath her feet was hot, for she had slipped off her pumps.

Edward came in from the barn and tiptoed carefully about down-stairs. Then he crept up the back way, and Anne heard him open Myrtle's door with cautious softness.

Life was not merely laughable, she told herself when the door had shut; life was an absurdity. She felt incoherently that God somehow made it a game, and now and then when a player was pushed to the wall, He let him stand there awhile and laugh at the rest.

Anne's head seemed strangely heavy now, and it ached terribly. She could feel a jagged saw pushed by a relentless hand farther and farther through the back of her neck. She tried to rise, but she knew in a minute that she was dizzily clutching the side of her bureau to keep from falling. Perhaps she was going to be ill. What a good joke it would be on Myrtle, who expected to have things made as easy as possible for her all summer! That would be the only joke God ever played on Myrtle. He seemed to prefer Anne and Mildred, she thought, as she sank again into the little rocking-chair. Well, she might as easily sit still and think, as to tumble around and wake up everybody. The heat rose in clouds now and swam about her head until she tried to escape it by bending over upon the window-sill. The varnish was hot and smelled abominably, but she could not raise her head to get away from it. She wished she might drink something cool, but the very thought of the lemonade Edward had fixed for her made her deathly sick. She would have to call some one after all. It was the first time she could remember disturbing them to do a service for her. Whom should she call? Not Mildred, for she would be too frightened to help. Besides, somehow she did not want to see Mildred.

Then all at once Anne crumpled up and slipped from the little rocking-chair to the floor. Somebody heard her fall, for footsteps came quickly down the corridor, and a quiet knock upon her door followed. When she did not answer, they called her name; there were more footsteps, the door opened, and after a short time, Edward's low cheerful voice said:

"It 's only a faint. Heat and indigestion."

Then she began to laugh, and looked straight up into his face as he bent over her bed.

"Heat and indigestion!" she echoed. "Oh, Lord!"

"She is a little hysterical, too," he added in a low tone, as he turned to Mildred, who stood near, very pretty in her yellow kimono, her eyes big with fear as they looked out from under her shadowing hair.

"I 'm not hysterical," contradicted Anne, from the bed. "I 'm delighted to be able to see how very funny everything is."

He came back to her then and laid something deliciously cool upon her hot head. Then he took her hand gently, one finger upon her pulse.

"You will be all right in a few days," he told her gravely.

"I said God never played a joke on Myrtle yet," she answered him.

CHAPTER XXV

ANNE received a flattering amount of attention the following morning and for many days afterward. Mildred wrote to Genevieve telling her that Anne was not well enough to be librarian of "even the circulating library of Bantam Hill," and Genevieve sent back a charming invitation for Anne to visit her in Lakewood, where she could be far enough from New York to rest and near enough to have a good time.

"Hurrah!" cried Mildred, as she read the letter, which Anne handed her silently. "Hotel life and a grand time for Anne till she gets well again. Keep still, Myrtle! I don't know what you are going to say, but I know we don't any of us want to hear it."

"Thank you," Myrtle replied acidly. "I was going to say I was very glad."

"Well, you can't prove it by me. You looked all ready to object." Mildred brought Anne the daily paper and tucked up the afghan about her feet so lovingly that Anne did not remind her that the day was already excessively warm.

"Mildred," said Edward, suddenly, from the corner where he was rummaging in the library table drawer for a thermometer he remembered putting there the day before, "why can't you let Myrtle alone for an hour or two? You have been scrapping with her ever since she came."

"Oh, we always scrapped, Edward," Mildred told

him good-humoredly, but she looked a little surprised.

"Well, please stop it. Myrtle is nervous anyway at present, and it makes me nervous, too, to hear you at it all the time."

"I 'm going up-stairs so you won't be bothered," Myrtle said with tearful sweetness. She pitied herself as she heard Edward speak.

When Edward had made ready to go to Hammerton he ran up the stairs to Myrtle two steps at a time, came down whistling cheerily, and stopped in the sitting-room to pull Mildred's curl just as he used to do long ago. The curls were supposed to be done up now, but she was vain enough to leave a tantalizing bunch of them loose, just where her hair coiled about the white nape of her neck.

Edward looked at her smilingly as she tossed her head and appeared not to see him.

"Good-by, kitten. Don't hold anything up against your brother-in-law, will you? Take good care of yourself, Anne. And *smile.*"

Anne watched him languidly as he swung off down the hill.

"Won't it be fun when his car gets here?" Mildred ruminated. Then she leaned nearer to Anne. She had been unusually gentle with Anne since the night of her illness.

"Don't go and leave us," she pleaded prettily.

Anne looked at her quite unmoved.

"I must get away," she said simply.

"But why?"

Anne turned her head wearily on the head-rest of the old invalid chair. "Why?" she echoed. "Oh, why anything in this world when you come to that?"

"What is the matter, dear?" Mildred whispered, laying her cheek against the arm of the big chair.

"Nothing. Don't, don't love me just now." Her voice was unsteady.

"Don't you feel better, Sister Anne?"

"Oh, I feel quite well."

"Is there anything I could do? I 'm so sorry I was mean and horrid that night."

"You did the most natural thing in the circumstances. The idea seems to be to sweep everything out of our way till we get what we want and then apologize."

"Anne!" Mildred raised her head and gazed at her sister incredulously.

"Only since you have brought up the subject, please don't expect me to do any more chaperoning for you."

"All right, I won't." Mildred spoke quietly, but her eyes looked dark. She was so hurt by Anne's unaccustomed hardness that she did not know how to answer her. Something chivalrously just about the girl told her that Anne was ill and depressed and not responsible for what she said. And to make it more difficult to bear, Mildred knew that she deserved a rebuke. She tried to smile bravely the next moment as she heard her mother's step. "Tell mother about your invitation," she said.

So for the next few minutes they talked of Anne's journey. Mrs. Carew was genuinely worried for fear she was not well enough to go as soon as she was planning to. Ever since Anne had been ill, her mother had shown a solicitude for her eldest daughter that would have touched Anne at any other time. But for the ten days since Mildred's graduation Anne had been apparently immune to tenderness.

"What do you want me to do for you, Myrtle?" she had asked one day with gentle irony, when Myrtle stooped to kiss her. Myrtle had looked blank at the question and then asked plaintively what the matter was with Anne, but the latter had only turned away in that stubborn silence which she seemed to find easier than speech.

"It 's funny the professor don't come down to see you," Mrs. Carew ventured now as she sat down by the opposite window and took out her knitting.

There was no answer.

"Mrs. Meekins said he was goin' to Washington this week," she went on.

"Yes."

"Do you know I kind of fancy that man lately. He ain't handsome, it 's true, but he looks real good, and he can certainly talk when he feels like it. He 's been readin' to some of the neighbors' children in the evenin', and Mrs. Meekins says he reads real well. Of course it was only foolish stuff, 'Alice in Wonderland' and a nautical story about babies, but the children were all tickled with it."

"How did he ever happen to do that?" Anne asked. Her tone was interested, and Mrs. Carew smiled wisely to herself.

"Well, he began to read to little Handy Meekins, who can't see very well, you know. And Handy asked somebody else in, and then they kept comin'."

"He certainly is n't the kind of man I used to think he was," Anne mused aloud.

"I think he 's terrible shy and covers it up with all these high-sounding words." Mrs. Carew clicked her needles triumphantly as she delivered this opinion.

"I should n't wonder at all," said Anne.

Mildred came in at that moment with a letter.

"Just an advertisement," she commented as she tossed it in Anne's lap.

Anne caught her breath. It was no advertisement. It bore the name of the publishing house to which she had sent her first story four weeks before, the story of Peregrine Saltonstall. She opened the envelope with fingers that trembled, and when she took from it a blue check she could hardly grasp the fact that her eyes were gazing at a slip of paper for which the Hammerton National Bank would pay her one hundred and fifty dollars.

"Mother," she gasped, and held out the fluttering bit of blue.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Carew and Mildred, in one breath.

"One hundred and fifty dollars for a story!" Anne cried in a choky little it-can't-be-true voice.

"My land of love!" ejaculated Mrs. Carew, dropping her work and gazing at this daughter of her own flesh and blood. Characteristically, her next offering was a question. "What in the world did you write about?"

Anne looked up quickly toward Mildred, then dropped her eyes to the check which she carefully folded up and tucked into the envelope.

"I wrote about life," she said. After that she read the friendly letter that accompanied the check. The editor praised her for her original development of character, and added that there would always be a keen appetite in the office for any stories which she cared to send savored with the inimitable irony distinguishing the last. "Your method of handling your characters is

keenly enjoyable, though hardly complimentary to humanity,'' wrote this kindly critic. ''It cannot be easily imitated, and for that reason we want more.''

''What will Professor Bernays say?'' Anne wondered to herself, and at that very moment he walked up the front steps and knocked upon the screen door.

''I did not hear that you were ill until yesterday,'' he explained after he had assured Mrs. Carew that he did not want the chair she had been sitting in. She went up-stairs nevertheless, leaving Dr. Bernays to the two girls.

''Tell him,'' Mildred exclaimed as soon as he had inquired politely about Anne's health.

Anne was relieved that Mildred asked no questions about the origin of the story. Of course it would come later, but the future could take care of itself, according to Anne's new philosophy.

She stretched out the envelope toward the professor. He rose to take it, looking puzzled and a trifle indifferent. He imagined it to be a letter from Lucille, but his face changed as he looked at it, and he gazed upon the inclosure as if he, too, doubted its reality.

''Don't disapprove of me when you see that check,'' she said.

He looked at it, and then slipped it into the envelope and gave it back to her, saying coolly:

''If you are glad, then of course I congratulate you.''

''Well, naturally I am glad,'' Anne said lightly, pretending not to notice his tone. ''That envelope contains a great many things not commonly inclosed in envelopes, wall-paper for the dining-room, for instance, and a pair of kitchen faucets.''

''I see.'' His tone was non-committal.

Anne sighed and turned her head away. She wanted his approval, but she wanted success too.

"It seems strange to see you playing invalid," he said, picking up a book from the table by her chair and leafing it through carelessly. He was more aware of Mildred's presence in the room than he had ever been before. For no special reason he wanted to see Anne alone.

Mildred rose from the desk, folding up a bulky letter which she had apparently just been finishing. Anne watched her as she addressed the envelope and she was sure of the long name that Mildred wrote with such a flourish.

"Anything I can do for you up-town?" the girl asked at the door.

"No, thank you." Again the hardness had crept into Anne's tone.

"She saw the address," Mildred told herself sorrowfully. "I don't care. She has spoiled her own life! She sha'n't spoil mine."

"Since this is the last time I shall see you for some months, had n't you better relieve my mind by telling me whether you are really ill or just pretending?" the professor asked when Mildred had gone. This was the first time Anne had ever known him to have one kind of conversation for her and another for her family. It was pleasant to have him so friendly and gentle, but Anne found herself shrinking unaccountably from anything which would call forth her better self. She seemed to revel lately in the fact that she was saying and doing the thing she wanted to, regardless of any one else. And she had an uncomfortable feeling that in a little while the professor would preach again.

"I 'm really ill," she said, and smiled at him impersonally. "It 's indigestion and therefore not contagious. It 's also nerves and temper and heat and overwork. We won't discuss the temper part, though I am apt to have a return of the old trouble."

"Well, well. You don't sound like the cheery little housewife who took me in to board last spring."

"That may be true. You don't sound like the didactic old bookworm I was always so in awe of in Maryland," she said daringly.

"Was I as bad as that?"

"Bantam Hill has certainly done a good deal for you."

"You have done more for me than Bantam Hill." His voice was full of a tenderness he could no longer hide. But since the conclusion which he had reached the night of Mildred's graduation he felt that Anne would never guess how much he wanted her friendship.

If she really cared about the broad-shouldered, good-looking young doctor she would never think of interpreting correctly the change in himself. He had just one desire before she went away, and that was to leave in her mind a pleasanter impression of him than she had taken away after that quiet drive to the farm and back.

"I shall never preach to you again," he said.

She smiled at him a little faintly, but made no answer. Her languidness helped him to go further.

"You have shown me more of unselfishness than I ever dreamed a girl could have, and I belittled it the other night only to spur you on to something more worthy of yourself than what you planned as your 'aim.' That is why I am disappointed about your story. It 's not worthy of you."

"Oh, there 's very little real unselfishness in the

world," Anne said wearily. "We generally seek our own happiness after all, I guess."

Her eyes did not meet his, however, and he took courage from this.

"You are not yourself," he answered her gently. "You need a rest and a change and then we shall have the merry heart back again."

"The merry heart?" she queried, with a lift of her eyebrows.

"'A merry heart goes all the day, your sad tires in a mile-a,'" he quoted.

"Most people tire in a quarter of a mile," she said, trying not to meet that new protecting tenderness in his eyes. She thought that he was sorry for her because she was ill, and she was bound to show him that her buoyancy was unchanged, but that she refused to be considered as ever having had the sacrificial spirit. That he recognized a new hardness in her she did not dream. Neither did she dream that he saw through the pride of her defense and knew that underneath this strange armor that she was wearing was the same high courage and tenderness as before, sheltered for the present since it had been so rudely attacked.

When she saw him rising to go she felt a childish desire to take back what she had said, but she told herself that it did not matter. He would never think of her again anyway. She tried to think of something specially kind to say that they might both have a pleasant memory of the parting, but nothing occurred to her that did not sound banal and unnecessary. Dr. Bernays, curiously enough, was the one who seemed more at ease. He left a courteous message for Mrs. Carew, who came

bustling down to receive it in person, and he wished Anne many good things on her trip.

Mrs. Carew discussed Anne's future avidly as she brushed the flies from the screen door and waited for the professor to allow himself to be bowed out. She watched his tall, thin figure in its dignified descent of the steps, and then she went in where Anne was sitting with drooping mouth and half-shut eyes.

"Never mind, Anne," she said pleasantly. "I would n't wonder if he came over to New York to see you." But Anne looked at her so coldly as she settled herself again with her knitting that she dropped a stitch in her endeavor to appear unconcerned.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE morning had dawned for Anne's postponed trip to Lakewood. She rose with more alacrity than she had shown for days, and ate so hearty a breakfast that they stopped worrying about her from that moment. Edward said shrewdly that a prospect of a change was all she had required, and Mrs. Carew ceased to bring her mysterious little bottles and boxes to be tucked into the corners of her daughter's suitcase and depended upon to cure headache, indigestion, and sleeplessness.

Anne kissed her mother good-by with a tenderness that made Mrs. Carew dab at her eyes with her apron.

"Don't bother to read my stories, mother; just use the money they bring and make me happy."

She did not wait for her mother's answer, but turned to Myrtle, who was listening curiously. As she kissed her, Myrtle said:

"I may read them, may n't I, Anne?"

"I only hope you have n't written anything improper," sighed Mrs. Carew, with religious fervor.

"Fancy, Anne!" Myrtle did not turn to Mildred as she spoke, and so failed to note the peculiar look of something near hostility which had come to that young person's expressive face. But she only ran out to the waiting carriage and lifted in Anne's suitcase with a determined swing before Edward could come to her assistance.

"Such a high rolling lassie," he laughed at her, to cover his own discomfiture.

"Don't! That always sounds to me like somebody's dairy maid," Mildred objected pettishly.

"Mildred's ideas are becoming too lofty for the likes of us," he complained to Anne as she came out to get in.

She did not seem to be interested enough to reply, for she was busy investigating the contents of the bag that hung from her wrist. When she had satisfied herself she stretched her hand down to Edward coolly, saying as she did so:

"Good-by. The best of luck in your work, Edward."

"Good-by," he answered, his face quite sober as he took her gloved hand. "You know all the good things I wish you, Anne."

"Thank you," she replied, almost too indifferently to convince him that she was really indifferent.

At the parlor window her mother and Myrtle were waving to her, and Anne waved once in return. After that she gazed silently down the white dusty hill without a word to Mildred.

Mildred made no attempt to talk. She felt sure that before Anne left her she would demand some sort of promise in regard to Chips, and on that one point Mildred was adamant. But Anne did no such thing. She began to talk after a little, about the flowers in Evelyn Dilloway's yard and about the stunted, thirsty corn on Mrs. Salt's four-acre lot. "We haven't had a real rain all day long for months," Anne said reminiscently.

"Not since Chips came, the last of April," Mildred thought, but she said not a word.

The village clock struck ten, slowly, resonantly. Anne listened and then sat a little more erect.

"You 'll have to hurry Nellie, or I shall miss the Hammerton train. That 's the only one that connects with the New York express."

It may have been the phrase which struck so pleasantly in Anne's ear, as if already her freedom was in sight, but she looked at Mildred with a little of her old solicitude in her eyes. Although she had been outwardly cold, she was obsessed by the fear that the girl would do something in her absence that would make them both regret this parting.

"I don't like to leave you, Milly."

Mildred's lips quivered, but she slapped the reins on Nellie's broad back and made no reply. She did not understand this new Anne, and yet she was ready to resist any interference if the old Anne returned. She wanted her sister to be quite natural and sweet and to love her just as usual, but she did not want the surveillance that was becoming hard for her to bear. At last she said slowly:

"You 'll have a grand time, and you 'll probably forget all about other people's troubles before you have been gone a week."

"Much obliged, dear. No, I 'll probably write them up instead, as it seems more profitable than worrying over them."

Nellie gave a surprised curvet under the sudden sting of Mildred's whip.

"Remember that horse is almost twenty years old," Anne warned her, smiling. She understood Mildred's quick resentment.

"You 'll be rich some day if you keep making people

like what you give them, but you 'll never be great,'' the younger girl said at last.

Anne was honest enough to see the truth of her little sister's indictment.

''I never asked to be great, Milly dear,'' she said with unconscious pathos. ''I only want to be rich enough to have the things one can buy with money to make up for all the things one can't.''

Mildred suddenly laid her hand on Anne's, turning to her with an impulsive little nod of triumph.

''There, Anne. You are lonely. That 's every single thing that is the matter with you.''

''I 'm afraid you have n't guessed rightly this time, Mildred. If I should try to put into your small head what I am discovering about the road to happiness you would n't be convinced, so you may think what you like. But I 'm coming back a different person, if I come back at all.''

''Anne, what do you mean?''

''This might be the very time to break away,'' Anne answered dreamily.

''But don't you care about mother and me and Myrtle and,''—Mildred hesitated adorably,—''and the little baby that 's coming? Oh, Anne, don't you care about the baby, either?''

''You funny girl! Can't I care without sitting in the ashes by the hearth all my life?''

''Oh, of course.''

''Mildred, what earthly good have I done for anybody in the family?''

Mildred hesitated. In that hesitation, which was quite unconscious on Mildred's part, the girl added the last drop of bitterness to Anne's cup. There were many

sweet and comforting things that Mildred might easily have said, except that at the very moment of the question, she had been thinking a little stubbornly of the way Anne had felt about Chips and of the story of Peregrine Saltonstall. So she did not speak at once, but when she did it was too late. She had seldom seen Anne so cold and quiet as she was during the rest of the drive. But when it came time for them to part at the station, they clung to each other a moment, forgetful of everything save that the miles would soon separate them. It was one of the ironies of Anne's life that Mildred had never needed her so much as she did at the very time that Anne chose to consider herself useless to her family.

Once in the train, the yearning to see Mildred again became so strong that she ran down the car to the open platform, where she commanded a view of the long white ribbon road up which Nellie was plodding. Anne fluttered her handkerchief, hoping that perhaps the girl would turn. She could see again in her mind the dewy freshness of Mildred's eyes as the girl had kissed her good-by, and she felt the clinging of the soft arms about her neck. No wonder Chips wanted her. And yet. What had Dr. Bernays said? "He is of no use in the world. And he would n't marry Mildred if you would let him. He is only enjoying himself."

Who was to watch over Mildred now? Yet Anne held her head proudly as she walked back to her seat. She would never again interfere until Mildred proved that she wanted her. And nothing could happen in the next few weeks. Edward and Myrtle and her mother—surely there were enough at home to watch over one wayward lass. Besides, Anne reminded herself that her new

policy was to let everybody's affairs strictly alone, supposing that each could look out for himself and that she, in her turn, was to become occupied by the success of just one person, Miss Anne Carew. It seemed easy to earn praise without deserving it, if one were sufficiently clever, and evidently the less one waited on oneself, the more other people did to make life pleasant. At all events the new discovery was interesting and well worth a further trial. The professor would not approve, but he did n't particularly matter. Of course he had been kind to her, very kind, but on the other hand, put in the new Anne, grimly, she had been very kind to him. So again she was even with the world.

At Hammerton she took the New York express, and as she found herself once more in the softly carpeted cars, where prosperous-looking travelers eyed her languidly and then turned once more to their reading, Anne forgot the haunting memory of Mildred's wistful face and gave herself to the excitement of actually going somewhere again. She loved the swiftness, the hurry and change, the little glimpses of people's real lives, the whole kaleidoscopic impression which every trip always provided her. For the first time in years she felt prosperous, thanks to the check from Peregrine. That gentleman would be the cause, she hoped, of much continued prosperity. She took out a new magazine, which she had bought at Hammerton, and then looking in her bag for her tickets, she came across her fountain-pen, and later wrote idly on the cover of the periodical, "From Peregrine Saltonstall with his compliments to Anne." She lined out the last, however, recalling the fact that Peregrine would call her Miss Carew, "even though I made him," she chuckled to herself.

She read a little, then dreamed for an hour, making over the story she had read till it suited her better. It seemed only a little while before she went into the diner, and here again a delicious feeling of possible extravagance urged her to make Anne Carew as comfortable as possible at the expense of Peregrine.

After an excellent dinner she went back to her car, wishing for a good book, only to find by the time-table that they were due at an important stop in less than an hour. It was certainly fun to travel, she told herself, and much more fun when for once there was nothing to worry about. It was the first time that her family at one end of the journey or her school work, to which she was going when she had turned her back upon her family, had not seemed to overshadow in some vague way even the nicest parts of the trip. But to-day there was nothing to think about but herself. She was no longer obliged to plan how to afford an evening coat for Myrtle or a school dress for Mildred. She needed no longer to think out examinations or correct sophomore briefs instead of finishing some interesting story. She was free, free from every thought or care and, better than all else, she had in her pocket-book a delightfully tangible bit of evidence that she and fortune were friends.

Through the long summer afternoon Anne read, slept, or lay with half-open eyes, watching the New England landscape slip away and the unlovely cities creep nearer and nearer together. She lost somewhat her feeling of happiness when trees and houses merged into a solemn dusk. Without knowing why, she felt that the darkness settling stealthily down upon the world about her was not big and friendly like the darkness that

brooded over Bantam Hill. It relieved her to turn to the cheerfulness of the lighted car and forget behind her drawn shade that home lay very far away. She hoped that Genevieve would not fail to meet her, and she wondered idly if Bynner would be there, too.

At ten o'clock, when the train was nearing 125th Street, people began to collect their belongings, and the few women in the car devoted themselves to pinning their hats straight and powdering their noses. Anne stood up with a little sigh for she knew not what, and as she was being helped into her coat, she caught herself hoping that Mildred would know where to look for the peach preserves, and that her mother would remember that John was to begin leaving milk at the Ainsworths' the first of the month.

When they drew in at 42d Street and Anne glimpsed the hurrying porters and the many lights, she was no longer aware of the peculiar sinking feeling that she had been trying to forget. She gave her suitcase to a smiling Red Cap and walked lightly down to the gate, hoping that she looked well enough to please Genevieve's critical eye, and yet aware that her suit was not so smart as it had been the summer before, when Myrtle had first admired it. At all events, her hat was becoming and her shoes were new. Moreover, if the editors would just give Peregrine Saltonstall a chance to come manfully to the front, she could be provided with a number of things that she had wanted to see herself in all her life. For instance, there was a stunning silk suit on the languid person with the flowing veil who was just ahead of her. And for a hat—

"Anne! Anne! Bless your heart, dear. I 'm so glad to see you," cried Genevieve, rapturously, as she

leaned across the brass railing separating the crowds of arrivals from those who were waiting. The last worry seemed to roll off Anne, at least for a while.

"I was so afraid you would n't be here," she laughed. "And I was looking for you and hoping you 'd know me and planning my new suit from the woman who just went by you now."

"Vain thing! To think of clothes when you were about to meet me! Bynner is here somewhere. He stepped over to the bulletin-board a minute. You are half an hour late."

"Am I?" Anne laughed unconcernedly. Then like a little girl, she asked, "What do we do now?"

"We give you something to eat and make you fat. Why, Anne, you would look about a hundred if it were n't for your color."

"I don't care. I 'll gain now. I have discovered a way to be happy, Genevieve. I 'll play all you like, and I 'm not going to think about home once; that is, not to worry about it."

Just then Bynner appeared with outstretched hand and such genuine welcome on his face that Anne gave him her most radiant smile. He dismissed the Red Cap, who had been assiduously filling in the background, while his sister talked to Anne.

"We are all going to stay in the city to-night," Genevieve explained. "We are to meet dad and mother at the Prince George—why, Anne, whom do you see?"

A daring vision in elaborate white, very lacy as to waist and short as to skirt, was just going by on the arm of a slim and dapper youth. The girl's face, with its brilliantly pink cheeks and cunningly darkened eyes, was turned toward him, but although he held her on

his arm in a most proprietory manner, yet he looked over her silly little hat with a vacant, glassy stare, murmuring to Anne:

"Ah, good evening, Miss Carew." For a moment the old Anne shivered and shrank back. Poor little Mildred! But the new Anne laughed as she turned to Genevieve.

"To think of meeting Peregrine Saltonstall in New York."

"Jove, what a name," commented Bynner, looking after him.

CHAPTER XXVII

"TELEPHONE call for Miss Carew," Genevieve said mischievously, as she handed the instrument to Anne. Anne, lying back in luxury among several downy pillows, did not even take the trouble to change her position, as she spoke a languid "Good morning" into the mouth-piece.

"Good morning," mocked Bynner's scornful tones. "What I would like to know is how much of this fine day you girls are going to waste dawdling around upstairs?"

"Bynner, your sister says to tell you how very sweet you sound this morning."

"Huh! Well the horses are engaged for eleven o'clock, and it 's half-past ten now."

Anne did not answer, merely laughed across the room at Genevieve. Bynner seemed to have exhausted his art of persuasion, for he still waited for her to speak, but Anne quietly hung up the receiver and set the telephone on the table by her bed.

"Anne, don't let the poor boy fall in love with you all over again." Genevieve spoke very gently and put her entire attention on a little silver buffer, which she was using at that moment, but Anne understood that it was Genevieve's well-bred way of extending a warning.

"He won't," she answered frankly. "We could never be in love, Jeannie."

"Oh, but the way he danced with you last evening at Spring Lake! I know he had at least six, and I was n't looking all the time."

"That was the effect of the yellow gown you cajoled me into buying. I should never wear yellow. I look too well in it." Anne laughed in glee at her own folly as she pushed aside the newspaper she had been reading, and prepared to get up.

"Well, don't give my favorite brother a heartache, whatever else you do. I was afraid that you had last year."

"Indeed, indeed, I won't." Anne was serious now. "Why, when I think of all the things you have done for me, I feel like a charity orphan. At least you might have let me help with the kiddies, instead of having a governess to add to your troubles."

Anne flung on a bright silk kimono and, with her hair still in a heavy braid over one shoulder, crossed the room to where Genevieve sat by a window overlooking the lake. In front of them hung a long mirror, and in that mirror Anne gazed at herself with some curiosity as she stood by the other's chair. Genevieve was talking and did not notice Anne's preoccupation.

"It has been just as much fun for me as it has for you, Anita. The only thing that I can't understand is why you never let me do it before."

Anne looked away from the girl in the glass, who had grown so undeniably beautiful in the last few weeks.

"I can't explain that. It would take too long, and Bynner is waiting for us now. To think of my lying up-stairs here, having hot chocolate and toast and reading the paper and answering telephone calls, when not long ago at this time every morning I was setting out

mush and milk and fried eggs for my brawny friend John."

"It has agreed with you," Genevieve put in, to change the subject. She was never particularly interested in John, or many others in Anne's home for that matter, believing that Anne's unhappiness was due entirely to them.

Again Anne stole a glance at the mirror, and this time she was observed.

"Pleased with yourself, are n't you, Sister Anne? I don't blame you at all. You are well worth looking at, when I think what got out of the train a month ago in the Grand Central Station."

"I have thrived by being selfish," Anne said curtly. Then in a more natural voice she added, "And all at your expense, Jean."

"Nonsense. It is n't much to stay here in Lakewood now. A winter resort in summer is the cheapest thing in the world."

"And it certainly is beautiful," Anne added softly.

"So are you, dear. Make yourself ready in twenty minutes, can you? I 'll go and encourage Bynner, as I 'm all dressed."

Anne braided her thick hair and tied it low in her neck; then she got out her riding things, which were hardly hers at all, when it came to a technical question of ownership, for Mrs. Merrick had loaned her the skirt and Genevieve had pretended to be provided with an extra pair of boots, so that Anne was always welcome to one pair. The fine silk shirt was hers, though, and the good-looking, black crush hat, which she pulled down over her shining hair and then tilted to the most becoming angle.

How had it all happened? She could hardly say why she had allowed herself to drift into this life of ease. Genevieve would hear no word of her looking for work yet awhile, and the position in the library was no longer open. She had written one story since she had left home and had sold it at once to the publisher of Peregrine Saltonstall. The prize-story contest would not be decided for another month, and she found herself wishing that she had the story she had submitted, that she might sell it without further delay. She had no idea that it would be successful in the contest. However, the money she could realize on it now would be most convenient at the present time. A winter resort might be cheap in summer, and Genevieve's generosity knew no bounds, but money came and went too easily in the Merrick family for them to understand that Anne was sometimes at a loss to provide things which she had never needed before.

If the family at Bantam Hill were curious about her, they kept their curiosity well hidden. They did not understand Anne, and she had a feeling that they were trying to let her alone until she became more like herself. Besides, she told herself, Mildred and Myrtle were neither of them particularly in need of her now, and there was less farm work this year than there had ever been. Anne had been slightly puzzled at the news that had come to her in disconnected bits. They had sold all their hay "standing," so that any extra help would be dispensed with. They were not planning to do much with blackberries this year. The peach crop seemed to promise well, but mother had decided to let Joseph Remick do the picking and selling. Anne shook her head and wondered at the lack of thrift, but when she

answered, she scrupulously kept all advice out of her letters. She was glad now that she had done so, for when she opened a letter from Myrtle, which Bynner handed her, she found the reason for the change in policy. A check fluttered out of the envelope, and as Bynner restored it to her, she smiled at him and wrinkled her nose a little.

"I 'm never prepared for that sort of thing; that 's why I could n't hold it."

"Bet you find a string attached," he replied as he lit a cigarette. Bynner was never rebuked now for his cynicism, and here again Anne showed a new wisdom, which was not as attractive as her old kindliness.

"Yes, there is," she answered, pausing between each word as she digested the fact that Myrtle had sent her a shopping list and would like the things at once.

"I suppose mother has written you that she had quite a little legacy from Aunt Mary Bixbee. We none of us expected it at all, but it could hardly have come in handier. You should be here to help Mildred with her clothes. She has invested rather wildly in Hammerton, but the effect seems to please Chips, and I confess she does look decidedly up-to-date. Chips is here every now and then, although he is very busy, as he is overseeing some of his father's business in New York. You might meet him, although it is n't likely. You may as well reconcile yourself, Anne, for I think there is no doubt of Mildred's being in love. The professor, who is coming back here after a while, they say, startled poor Milly by warning her that Chips would never marry her in the world. Mother got quite angry at Dr. Bernays and decided that it was rather an immoral thing to say to the poor child, but I don't suppose he realized

how it sounded. Our family is just as good as the Chippendales when it comes to that. Before I close, Mildred says, tell you she really misses you and if you 'll say the word she will come to New York, but she has used up her share of what mother gave her and can't pay her expenses. Maybe mother will give you a check when you come back, but we are taking it for granted that you are living in clover already. We have seen just one story and that is Peregrine Saltonstall. Edward calls it a jim-dandy, but the rest of us feel a little doubtful. When you spoke about the woman who could never find but one shoe, did n't you mean mother, and no one could fail to recognize Mrs. Salt in the old lady who lent the pin and then said she could n't do it again, because pretty soon it would be a whole paper of pins. And I have since found several things in the hero that I know must refer to Chippendale Hall, for all Mildred is very silent about it. On further thoughts, Anne, I 'm not so sure that mother will send you any check. Edward says for you to smooth our feathers down with your next story. You probably know what he means."

Anne looked up from the letter with blazing cheeks. The horses trotted into the courtyard at that minute, and the groom dismounted, with a word to the messenger-boy who waited at the inside gate. Anne looked out at the restive black horse that was Bynner's choice. She drew on her gauntlets and caught up a little silver-handled riding crop, which Mr. Merrick had given her when he came down from New York the last time.

"Come on! Come on!" she called to the two behind her. "What will you give me if I ride Sulphur?"

"You will probably need an ambulance and a six-

weeks' order from the florist," he answered to her mood.

"How sad! Let 's prove it. What do you say, Sulphur?"

Sulphur arched his neck and showed the whites of his eyes.

"He 's a wicked brute; stick to your own horse, Anita," Bynner cried as he came and stood beside her.

"Yes, do," Genevieve added, looking worried. "Queer how much confidence a few lessons will give you, Anne. I used to feel the same way some days, but we can't either of us ride well enough to experiment with Bynner's horse."

"A few lessons—your grandmother!" burst out Bynner, when they were riding together, with Anne and the groom ahead. "It was a letter from that blasted old farm-house that made her so crazy. I can't stand the sight of a Bantam Hill postmark any more. Talk about Peregrine! I hope she 'll roast the whole family brown in her next story."

"Don't tell her so. She does n't consider her stories personal at all."

"Does n't she, eh? Well, I trust she leaves me out of them, that 's all, for if I did n't recognize a few people, then I 'm a dunce."

Anne turned around and waved her whip at him.

"We are going to take the Barnegat road," she called.

"Sounds as if we were to be left behind," he said, making a face. "Well, we 'll wait till she rides it off."

And wait they did, for Anne took longer to "ride it off" than they had expected.

"Don't let 's go back to the hotel for luncheon," urged Genevieve, after an hour's rhythmic cantering

down the hard state road. "I 'm sure Anne would be glad of a change, and I should, too."

Bynner spurred up to put the proposition to Anne, and she responded so eagerly that he knew she was delighted to escape even for a while from good-natured Mrs. Merrick and the rocking-chair friends of the Moana.

They returned late in the afternoon, and Anne was her old self, laughing whole-heartedly at Bynner's stories, which he tried his best to make unusually amusing, adding to the general fun by her own quick comments on everything, and apparently quite forgetful of her recent heartache. The late afternoon light lay on the lake as they rode happily around the sandy road that bordered it. The pines bent fragrant branches overhead and at the curve of the road, hard by a rustic bridge, a cosy, sunset-tinted tea-house seemed to invite them to linger a while.

They dismounted a little stiffly, while Anne made many a jest about the effects of her first very long ride. Bynner helped her with elaborate care and, leaning on his arm in mock helplessness, Anne entered the twilight depths of the little tea-house.

The one table that was not shielded by the high backs of the rustic benches flared with candles, which looked sickly yellow in contrast to the path of light that lay straight across the lake and crept up even to the window by the candles. Anne waited for a second in the unaccustomed light, still with her hand on Bynner's arm. The two who sat at the table opposite leaned forward and stopped talking, so that for a second there was a curious unexpected stillness in the room, broken only by the water lapping against the pebbly shore beneath

the tea-house. It was only for a second, however. Genevieve, just behind, whispered, "Anne, those people know you," and at the same time Lucille Bernays gave a delighted little shriek and started for Anne. Dr. Bernays rose, too, and everybody but the doctor joined in a general babble, in which Lucille explained that they had sent a telegram, which was to reach them an hour before the train was due, and that they were merely wasting time waiting for them to come back. Genevieve was introduced and Bynner, too, while Anne felt that a general appraisal was going the rounds and that every one seemed satisfied, except perhaps Dr. Bernays. He was as quiet as ever, but he held her hand very closely for a minute and listened carefully to hear what she answered to his, "How are you feeling, Miss Carew?"

She flashed a smile at him, and then made a gay little motion with her riding-crop.

"Oh, I 'm idle rich, you see. And loving it, too." Bynner tried to look fatuous, but it was lost upon the serious professor.

"You are still on the vacation, I take it?" he pursued as they all found seats at the table.

Anne sank into the seat nearest the window, with a groan that was not entirely forced.

"Oh, I 'm having a wonderful time," she said gaily, "growing stiff and old enjoying the pastimes of Lakewood. We have ridden many, many miles to-day. I don't dare tell you how far."

"I 'd like that," he answered in such honest envy that she opened her eyes at him.

"You like to ride?"

"I certainly do."

"Why, Anne, he used to do forty miles before breakfast when we lived out West," Lucille put in.

"Not forty," he corrected her gravely.

"You admire brother just as much, even if you are engaged," Anne teased her.

"Oh, yes." Lucille dimpled and blushed, and then paid Anne back. "As for you, I don't know what has happened, but three months in New England has robbed you of the respect that I brought you up to show for him in Maryland."

"He is my literary critic," Anne said saucily, "and how can one have respect for a critic?"

"She did n't. Witness 'The Battle Bow' changed into 'Thankful for Thirty.'"

"What is 'Thankful for Thirty'?" Lucille put the question, but Genevieve looked her curiosity.

"Now you 've done it," Anne cried, beginning to pour the tea.

"I—I 'm awfully sorry. I thought they knew," he stammered, passing a cup to Genevieve, but keeping his gaze fixed on Anne until Bynner leaned forward and rescued the tea-cup from its threatened descent upon the table. Then he spoke:

"Dr. Bernays, you have the habit that we all get, of looking at Anne to the exclusion of our food. If I might remind you that your tea—"

Dr. Bernays looked up, a little at a loss how to answer. Friendly badinage of the type which Bynner indulged in was an unknown quantity to him. Moreover, it put his relations to Anne in a public and startling light.

Genevieve gave her brother a warning touch under

the table, and pursued the subject of "Thankful for Thirty."

"What is it, anyway?" she asked Anne. "You haven't written a book, have you? Or is it another story?"

"It 's a sinful, sarcastic attempt to be funny," Anne said lightly, looking at Dr. Bernays. Their eyes met. There was a look in his that thrilled Anne with a quick hope that he had some use for her after all. She knew now that she could never enjoy her success without his approval.

"Anne, you have grown gay as well as literary," Lucille said suddenly.

Anne turned her eyes from Dr. Bernays and laughed a little self-consciously.

"One can't grow literary, Lucille dear. I believe it 's as natural as wickedness, and your brother thinks in my case that the terms are synonymous. But, thanks to Genevieve and Bynner, I have grown more—what shall I say?"

"More adorable every minute." Bynner's answer was not audible to any one but Anne, for Lucille had substituted, "I 'll run the risk of turning your head, and say that you 've grown heaps more stunning, Anne."

But Anne knew that Dr. Bernays had seen the look that Bynner gave her, and she flushed a little at the idea that he might think the less of her if he did not understand Bynner's irresistible desire to flirt.

She wished that he did not draw her eyes so constantly in his direction. He had not missed her these last few weeks, else he would have written to her, and she wondered why her heart persisted in leaping when he looked at her as he had a moment before.

She watched him even against her will, while Genevieve and Lucille compared notes on New York's best shops. He looked very serious and middle-aged in contrast to Bynner's gay boyishness. Yet she knew that he would command attention and respect wherever he went. His very manner of speaking showed that he was used to being listened to. And from all accounts, allowing for Lucille's enthusiasm, he was considered a very great authority in his subject.

"Speaking of books, you must see Arthur's monograph," Lucille said, turning to Anne. "It is awfully learned, and of course *I* think it 's a wonder."

"Genevieve, let 's bring out some monologues. This crowd is getting ahead of us," Bynner complained, pensively emptying the tea-pot.

"Oh, I have n't done anything," Lucille hastened to add.

"No; she is engaged to a walking chronology of mediæval Europe," Anne put in a little wickedly.

"Anne Carew! I don't know whether I 'll invite you up to New York with us to-morrow or not."

"Oh, I 'm going, anyway. I have some shopping to do for Myrtle," Anne answered coolly, but she laid an affectionate hand over Lucille's before she rose.

"Myrtle's list is a mile long," she added rather grimly as she stood with Bynner by the door.

"And the check half a mile short?" he asked in an undertone.

"Exactly. But that is n't troubling me so much as the way she wrote. I 'll tell you later. I 'm all over caring now."

She became aware of Arthur Bernays's eyes upon

her, and began flicking her riding crop upon her leather shoes. Then she swung her hat at him and smiled.

"We can take you up behind us or in front of us, but I don't think it 's very dignified. Shall we see you later?"

"Anne, I don't care a bit if you walk back to the hotel with them," Genevieve whispered anxiously.

Anne conjured up an instant vision of the long quiet walk beneath the pines, but stealing a look at the professor, who stood near enough to hear, she saw that his face was quite impassive. "Sunsets and little new moons and the waterfall at the head of the lake, what is it all to that old book worm!" she stormed to herself.

Aloud she spoke a little tartly:

"I hate to talk about it, but I 'm stiff and getting stiffer. The quickest way home, please. And we 'll see you at dinner."

As the professor and his sister started out along the foot-path, the soft thud of hoofs came to them now and then where the road bent in close to the lake.

"She seems very happy," Lucille said, "and looks well too."

"There is a most beautiful sunset to-night," the professor said a little wistfully. "I think she would have enjoyed walking."

Lucille looked up at her brother quickly and detected a new expression on his face. She knew him very well, and her own happiness made her a sure interpreter. She touched his arm with gentle fingers, and said kindly:

"Anne has n't a particle of romance about her, Arthur."

From the head of the lake, Anne's laugh rang out, a charmingly musical laugh with just a hint of hardness

in it. The professor wondered if anybody had noticed it but him. Then he remembered that Lucille had spoken. She had said there was no romance in Anne.

"Evidently not, judging from her excuse," he said unsmilingly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"WAS N'T it lovely of Lucille to look in on us like this?" Anne exclaimed joyously, as she and Genevieve hurried to change from their riding-habits and be ready for their guests.

"I should say so! I 've always wanted to see them both; they were such friends of yours in Maryland." Genevieve shook down her hair and then glanced through it at Anne. "Has n't the doctor nice eyes, Anne?"

"He 's not a doctor of medicine, you know," Anne corrected her innocently. "He used to teach at Schull College."

"Yes, I remember perfectly. And he 's the one who has been digging around New Hampshire for the remnants of some glaciers."

"He has been studying the order, succession, relative position, dip, and comparative magnitude," Anne stated, with a twinkle.

"Comparative magnitude of what?"

"Your thirst for information is too great. Ask him when you go down-stairs. Did you notice's Lucille's engagement ring? I can't reconcile that great diamond with our little history instructor down there."

"Well, I hope she will be happy, but I could never marry a teacher," Genevieve declared. She took care to watch Anne, however, as she announced this ultimatum.

Her ruse failed, for Anne only studied her own re-

flection quite closely in the big silver hand-glass, and then answered in a preoccupied tone, which would set at rest the most suspicious person:

"No, I don't think I could either. How about my yellow dress again to-night, Genevieve? Are you tired of it?"

"Not in the least. And it 's vastly becoming." Anne smiled wisely to herself at Genevieve's relieved expression, and added as she took down the dress in question, "But he has the finest eyes of any man I ever met."

There was a sudden noise. Genevieve had dropped a slipper. She was leaning forward, her eyes upon Anne's face.

"So you like him, Anne?"

"Only as a friend, dear. I was just trying to make you tell me what you thought, and you have."

"How have I?"

"Well, you don't really fancy him, do you?"

"As a literary critic I think he would be ideal."

"But as anything else?"

"I can't tell yet, Anne, but it seems to me he would never be able to fall properly in love. Is n't he rather opinionated and a little conceited?"

"You read a lot into his character in a very few moments," Anne protested, but she was forced to acknowledge that she agreed with Genevieve. Nevertheless, she dressed with exceeding care and could not help being glad that she was looking well.

Lucille spoke of Anne's appearance as soon as they had come down-stairs.

"I was prepared to see a little ghost, from what my brother said, but you are quite like yourself, Anne."

Anne thought for a moment that Dr. Bernays looked embarrassed as he glanced his way. So he had been writing to Lucille in detail about her. It was nice of him to take so much interest, anyway. And how good it was to see him again, and be aware once more of the grave, kindly appraisal of the serious brown eyes behind the glasses. He was not ridiculously scholarly in appearance, either, and he was chatting quite easily with Bynner about the last polo game. He had certainly improved since the earlier part of the year.

Dinner was gay, and they sat long at the table. They were almost the only guests, for Lakewood's hotels were nearly all closed, and the few remaining people at The Moana had planned dinner on the lake.

Mr. Merrill leaned back comfortably at the end of the last course, and looked over the empty dining-room.

"Pretty good place to rest, this, after everybody else is through wintering here," he remarked between a series of indolent puffs.

"It seems like a delightful place," Professor Bernays remarked politely. He had refused a cigar, but had declared that he would have his pipe later on the veranda when there was nobody to mind.

"It 's done wonders for this little girl here," Mr. Merrill went on genially, and his wife added, "You would n't know Anne for the same girl."

Anne remained quite cool under the eyes that were bent in her direction, but she made a graceful little gesture of deprecation toward the Merrills as she turned to Lucille, saying:

"I have been treated ever so royally, and yet here I am, making all my money,"—she spread her hands as if to indicate a vast pile of wealth,—"trying to prove

that there is n't much that 's good in human nature after all."

"You 'll make about a dollar and thirty-nine cents out of stuff like that, and then your readers will turn and rend you, and serve you right, too," Bynner put in with brotherly rudeness, but his eyes as he glanced toward Anne were too fond to be critical.

Professor Bernays heard the remark and caught the look that neutralized it. He smiled stiffly, while his sister bent forward with all her old frankness.

"Keep it up, Anne. I always told you that you could write one thing and feel another. What does it matter about your stories, if they sell, and it does n't really hurt you to write them?"

"It does hurt her," broke in the doctor, with a trace of his old dogmatism. "Pater says the style is the man, and if Anne's style is really Anne, then she—is—" He hesitated. His manners were coming to the rescue.

"Yes?" prompted Anne, gently, but she was daring him to go on.

"A traitor to her friends and a disbeliever in the good of human kind."

Anne did not speak for a moment; nor did any one else.

Bynner, whose criticism had virtually embodied the same idea, dropped his colors, and rode valiantly to the rescue.

"We must n't pretend to understand Anne's talent," he said. "She 's two people, the nice little girl we know, and the clever writer who can jiggle all her characters on a toasting fork and then describe their antics till you forget you 're one of them and forgive her and want more."

"Bynner, I think you make it worse," Anne said suddenly, and threw an imploring look at Mrs. Merrill, who adjourned the party to the piazza. Here it was that Anne found herself cornered by Dr. Bernays, while Genevieve and Lucille talked over their favorite topic as to where to shop and finally got deep into a discussion of comparative values in different cities.

Dr. Bernays lighted his pipe without apology, just as if they were sitting on the back steps of the Carew farmhouse. Anne, trying to forget how hurt she was from the criticism at the table, wished miserably that they were both back in New Hampshire, and that her first story was yet unpublished.

"I can't go back now and write a different kind," she said abruptly, speaking her thoughts aloud, but he understood her.

"Have you tried?"

She hesitated. He evidently did not understand why she persisted in what she was doing, and Anne felt that she wanted to explain to him.

"I can't do anything else after I have created a certain style for myself. That 's all the editor will take."

"Have you tried?" he persisted.

"What 's the use?"

"How can you tell what you can do?" he asked almost rudely. "You haven't written very long. It 's absurd for you to declare that you can't do this or that, when your total output, as yet, is almost negligible."

Her cheeks grew hot.

"But I know what I can write, where I feel surest of myself," she defended.

He grunted indignantly.

"All right. If you are that kind of girl, then go

ahead. Turn us all into a Punch and Judy show and make us as funny as you can. Your friends will soon fear you, and your money will be the price of their friendship, but you will have justified your art, if you call it that. There is no beauty in it; neither is it lasting. You, of all people, with your love for what is worth while in literature, should know that a great name can never be made this way."

"Swift did it," she put in hotly.

He did not even answer this last, and she was grateful to him for not contesting her analogy or ridiculing her supreme vanity. His next remark was gentle. He did not look at her while he spoke, but he stared out on the water, dark except for a path of moonlight from the tea-house to the Kissing Bridge.

"When you came into the little tea-house this afternoon, I saw you as I have never seen you before. I realized that you were in your own element for the first time since I had known you. You are made to be wealthy and care-free. Service should be yours to take, not to give. You are radiant in prosperity. You are brilliant when you know that your surroundings are pleasing, and that there is no flaw in your background. There is not really a hardness in you yet, but scintillation is not exactly a glowing of personality. If you depend upon all these things, you must have them. You are obtaining them now from the Merrills."

He pretended not to see that Anne winced under this last. He only went on calmly.

"You will obtain them, you fondly hope, from your writing, and perhaps this is true. And then later you will marry some one who will give them to you."

Anne clasped her hands in her lap. She was very

white, and her throat was choked with wild anger at this man who dared to talk to her so insolently. She wanted to justify herself, but he left her no chance, and somehow when there was silence she could not find words to tell him what she wanted him to believe about her. She had never dreamed that she could be so cut by severity from him. How shamed she would be if he should realize how he had hurt her! She tried to breathe evenly and to speak as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

"You take an unusual interest in my work, Dr. Bernays. Are you not overreaching the privilege of even a critic?"

"Perhaps. But I can't be merely a critic, Anne. I want the best for you always. I used to think life had n't treated me quite fairly, what with ill health and a good many inconvenient things that went with it. But I 've discovered that you get out about what you put in."

Anne was silent. She could not seem to cherish anger against this man. She wished that he would make some sign of reinstating her in his good opinion. Her longing for his friendship suddenly seemed to her too great to be hidden.

He leaned forward and rapped his pipe on the little ash holder by his side.

"I ought never to have lectured you, Anne."

Anne wanted to tell him that she was glad he had been so honest with her, but she could not seem to find the words. Characteristically, he was the one to end the interview. She was trembling, but quite speechless when he rose.

She rose, too, and before she realized it he had taken

a step forward; his eyes searched hers in the moonlight, his hands reached toward her for a minute, and then dropped at his side.

Anne's heart had leaped at his coming, but she gained instant control of herself. They said good night in a most perfunctory manner.

Anne's last waking thought was not of her work, but of the look in Arthur Bernays' eyes as he came toward her on the moonlit porch. For a fleeting moment he had shown her what he could be like with all his reserve broken down.

CHAPTER XXIX

ANNE was far from obeying the suggestions of Arthur Bernays, else perhaps she would never have been in New York working from July until September, but she did follow one piece of advice, given in a letter that she received soon after their conversation in Lakewood. "Keep a journal. It will help you in self-expression and perhaps improve your style. It is impossible to be hard and brilliant when talking to one's self."

Hardly complimentary and yet rather wise advice, Anne decided. She felt a certain satisfaction in doing what he wanted her to do, since there were so many things of which she knew he disapproved. And from her journal Anne learned a great deal. Introspection may be a dangerous practice, but it is an excellent remedy for egotism. Anne might easily have been spoiled by the gay little circle with which Genevieve and Bynner soon surrounded her, but her journal gave her back unflinchingly the truth about herself, for she was too honest to gloss or expiate. The fragments which she found herself re-reading from time to time were not comforting. They were rather a pitiful, accusing series of records in which success seemed a relative and rather independable thing, once her perspective was adjusted. Who was she anyway to start out alone, demanding a career and a place for herself where her family would not interfere? What had she ever done to warrant such a high-handed procedure? She was no great genius; hun-

dreds of writers could do better, were doing it every day. Why could she not work at home? What priceless thing was her life in the city giving her that she had pushed everything else out of the way? Now and then a sermon or a concert, and rarely, for she was still too poor to afford many such nights, a grand opera would leave her feeling bitterly dissatisfied, yet passive through it all; wilted, so to speak, by the heat of some one else's inspiration. "Temperament," Genevieve scornfully pronounced it, and refused to sympathize.

"What am I doing?" she asked Genevieve suddenly one Sunday night, as the two prepared a cosy supper after attending an up-town church service.

"Making Welsh rabbit," answered Genevieve promptly.

"Please don't be flippant." Anne stopped stirring and fixed two serious eyes upon Genevieve.

"Explain what you mean, and I 'll answer," the other responded rather languidly as she dropped her cooking book to turn a preoccupied gaze upon Anne.

"Am I doing anything worth while? Enough to pay for having left my whole family just because things did n't seem to go my way? I 'tired in a mila-a' and—and—" She hesitated. "Dr. Bernays knows it if you don't."

"Oh, Anne, must you be introspective to-night, with salad dressing still to make and Bynner and Jack Ford coming in a minute?"

"All the same," Anne insisted, as she resumed her stirring, with one guilty eye upon the clock, "I don't believe I 've progressed far enough to warrant my talking about a career yet awhile."

"Well, don't have a career. Make enough money to

have a good time and go back and give the family presents every now and then. They will love you twice as much. If you want to starve what genius you have, carry it back to Bantam Hill and shut it up in that old farm-house. That 's all I have to say. Where are the eggs?''

Anne laughed and produced the desired articles from a box beneath her desk. But all through the evening there was a seriousness about her that warned Genevieve that she was still thinking.

The next afternoon Anne was curled up on the couch with a letter from home when Genevieve came to take her out for tea. Genevieve knew from the sight of her face that the decision had already been made.

''I 'm going home,'' Anne announced without prelude.

''So?''

''Yes, I am, and you need n't remind me of teas or dances or even that invitation from Leone Hall to go motoring. I 'm going home.''

''An ode, in one key! Wherefore, Anne? I don't mean to be horrid about Bantam Hill, honestly. But are you *sure* you know what you want?''

''In this case, yes. Mildred has completely lost her head over Chips, and even Myrtle seems alarmed. They don't like him as well as they did. Besides, they have discovered that Arthur Bernays and I have been telling them the truth about him.''

''I see.'' Genevieve loosened her coat thoughtfully. Then a gleam of fun suddenly danced in her eyes.

''That full-size cover illustration of 'Thankful for Thirty' will just about reach Bantam Hill when you do. I 'd like to see their eyes.''

"I 'm really worried about Mildred." Anne did not seem to heed the other's enthusiasm.

"And for once they 'll take your advice, because you have certainly become a different girl, Anne. They won't impose on you any more."

" 'They are mine own people,' " Anne quoted a little rebukingly, as she went back for the third time to Myrtle's letter. One paragraph she read aloud.

" 'I don't trust Mildred any more, Anne. She is infatuated with Chips, and nothing we can say does any good. She believes Chips against the whole world.' "

"That makes it nice," Genevieve commented dryly. "Go ahead, Anne. Do the blasée woman of the world for them, and denounce Chips in the spectacular way that you were rehearsing for Bynner and dad yesterday."

"I could speak more feelingly of that little simpleton that Bynner was teasing you about than I could of young Chippendale."

"The world is full of simpletons, Anne. Take them calmly, but keep them out of the family if possible."

"I think I will go home to-morrow," Anne said decidedly, ignoring Genevieve's last remark. "I honestly think that Mildred would come back to New York with me if I asked her to. That would soon settle everything."

"But she 'll be in your way here. How can you write and be free to motor and dine and play around as you have been doing?"

"If I can help Milly, it 's all right about everything else. Only I 'm afraid she will never listen."

Already Anne was taking a survey of her wardrobe and planning what she should pack. Genevieve rose

and looked over her shoulder as she stood by the open closet door.

"Take this and this and this." Genevieve, finger outstretched, indicated a dark-red dinner dress, which Anne had only worn once, and two of her most becoming street dresses.

"I have n't any need for that red thing," Anne protested. "I only bought it to go to that dinner that Mr. Everett gave for me. Bantam Hill would be stunned if I appeared in it."

"That 's what I want you to do, *stun it.* They have n't seen you since you crawled out of town looking like Washington Irving's 'The Broken Heart.' Wear a few of these things and show them that you are really festive once again."

"I will not show off when I can hardly believe that most of my good fortune is n't accidental."

"Show off? Don't talk to me. Arthur Bernays is at Bantam Hill, and I want you to make a favorable impression, better than ever, I mean."

Anne was listening now, there was no doubt about that.

"I 've made my favorable impression, thank you," she said lightly. "And it has brought me—the friendship of a good man." The last words were not so light. Anne turned away, but not before Genevieve had seen her telltale color.

"Oh, Anne, you never told me."

Anne busied herself with the contents of her top bureau drawer. "There is n't anything to tell even now."

"Nonsense. He is in love—"

But Anne's hand covered her mouth before she could continue.

"I won't have it discussed. I won't!" Anne said fiercely. "I 've never had even a harmless friendship that it has n't been speculated and calculated and investigated till I was nearly dead of it. Now this is one thing that I shall not let any one, even you, mention to me again. I 'm happy. I have work and a reasonable amount of success assured, and nothing else is going to enter my thoughts."

"Just as you say." Genevieve smiled wisely to herself, but she added, "I shall tell Bynner to give up hoping, that 's all."

"You may save yourself. He does n't need the warning."

"And I do hope you will be happy, honey, no matter how it all comes out."

"Oh, I shall be," replied Anne, ungratefully. "No dramatics, Genevieve. I can buffet the whole world now I know how."

"It did n't look last night as if you thought you knew how!"

"That 's just it," Anne answered, stopping in her vigorous brushing of a suit, to face Genevieve with flushed cheeks. "It 's opposition or a hard struggle that puts fresh spirit into me. Why, I *want* to go home and help. I really do."

The other sighed and smiled.

"You are well rested, Anne, and you 've lost your memory of all the carping, disagreeable things that used to make you so unhappy."

"No, I have n't. I 've decided that I know how to

behave now and I did n't then. By the way, may I borrow your suitcase?"

"You certainly may. You are the kind of person just suited to its satin-lined elegance, and I never carry it, as you know. Will you have dinner with us? We are to be in town to-night."

"No dinner for me, thank you. I 'll lunch quite modestly and have a good sleep. But I 'll be grateful if Bynner will leave the suitcase. I must start early for Bantam Hill if I am to have the pleasure of putting up the evening's milk supply."

"I think they won't be as likely to ask you as they would have once. I 'll send Bynner over. And be a good girl, little Anne."

"Indeed, yes. I shall be as good as any avenging angel could be who comes sweeping down upon a harmless Chippendale."

Anne received Genevieve's kiss a little passively, but gave her an affectionate pat as she went out.

"You don't have to worry about me as you did once," she said.

When Bynner came later with the suitcase, he added something to Anne's collection of interesting incidents in regard to Chips.

"I 'm not a gossipy old woman, Anne, but Jean tells me that it 's getting serious between Chippendale and Mildred. You might tell her from me that he has several inamoratas living here in New York. I 'm not sure of any details, but I could get them. He 's such a clam I don't see what they like about him."

"His money, of course."

"Even so, he 's quite a dose to go with the money."

"He seems to have a hidden charm," Anne remarked dryly.

"By jove, I wish I had." Bynner looked really wistful despite the twinkle in his eye. "No use wishing for the moon, is there, Anne?"

"None at all," she answered cheerfully. "And thank you for bringing the suitcase over, Bynner."

"You're welcome." He still stood looking at her, so solemnly that she smiled at him.

"Why so dreary?"

"Oh, you 'll go down there to Bantam Hill and you 'll see that tall thin fellow that helps you write your stories—"

Anne drew herself up, her eyes sparkling dangerously.

"He does n't write my stories, and what if I do see him? You 've been pretending to make love to me for two years, but you may stop right now. And I hope you marry a red-haired girl who calls you Bynny and won't even give you a door-key."

"Good for you, Anne. Hoping you are the same, I remain." And with a sweep of his hat he left her. But he came back after a second and shook hands with her properly. "I always did like you, Anne, and I wish you good luck in this matrimonial venture that you intend to smash up."

She laughed as she gave him her hand.

"You do have such an attractive way of putting things. I think your knowledge in regard to Chips will help, all the same."

"Hope so. Good-by." And he was gone.

CHAPTER XXX

ANNE started for home the next morning under most inauspicious conditions. The September day had dawned cold and cloudy, and before seven a dull fall of rain from a leaden sky proclaimed the beginning of a severe storm. Anne, warm and comfortable in the softly lighted Pullman car, tried to fight off the depression that the rain brought. She told herself that she had nothing to worry about, that is, nothing but Mildred, and surely she could succeed if she allowed herself to plead with the girl. Money was easier to earn now than it had ever been, and people seemed kinder. Her uneventful life in Bantam Hill had been more than paid for in the excitement that work and new friends had furnished. Anne had never known before how large a part of life could be given over to eating and motoring and dancing and eating again, until she allowed these friends to show her. She could tempt Mildred, if need be, with the kind of life that was waiting for her if she would only come and visit her and give up Chips. Of course she would have to be very careful of Mildred, even under her own eye in New York, for Anne was not as trusting as she had once been. But surely Mildred would be safer and happier. Yet somehow Anne could not picture Mildred yielding. Chips would come first to the very end, until she was shown what he really was. And even then would she believe?

Anne felt the sense of depression growing stronger. Surely it was the dripping, leaden day that so oppressed her. She had no real cause for worry, not half so much as when months ago she had sped toward New York to seek comfort in work. Her thoughts wandered away from Mildred to Professor Bernays and his reasons for returning to Bantam Hill since Lucille's marriage. His work there was finished, she had thought. She hoped he would approve of her now more than he had in New York. At least he would be pleased at her last and greatest news, the fact that the story submitted in June had won second prize in the contest. Yes, it was pleasant to be going home successful rather than a failure. Yet Anne's heart did not warm to her work, even though it had brought her so much. She was interested to see that in the chair across from her own was a girl beginning to read her story in the October number of the "Kosmos," and she watched the girl's face intently to get her impressions as she read. But Anne was not thrilled at the sight of the reader across the way. In fact, she almost wished that the girl had chosen another and pleasanter story. It was really too bad to disappoint her in people when she looked so severely optimistic. The very next story, Anne happened to know, was a cheery bit of narrative concerning an old lady and a good-looking nephew without a single vice. The ending was ideal, for the old lady gave her blessing to the nephew and the pretty girl whom he had met in the garden, leaving the reader with a pleasant feeling of having been harmlessly entertained without too much thinking.

"Why don't I try that kind of thing?" Anne asked herself. "I believe I will. Just a dash of romance;

leave out all malice and every species of heartache, put a Sunday-school finish on the principal character and —there is the story."

She experimented a little in the next few hours, planning out the tale in her ever-ready note book. It was not so easy as it seemed. Anne's style had formed even in her first few stories, and every character she tried to write of insisted on taking shape as an exaggeratedly absurd person, whose main purpose in life was to convey the impression that he was something which he clearly was n't. Anne put down her pencil after a discouraging hour of it, and frowned off into the Connecticut landscape.

She began to wonder if her own view of life was beginning to be colored by her work. She consoled herself instantly. A few months of work could not change her very much, the only harm it could do would be the thing it had already done, prejudice people against her personally. But that was rather fun, for the men and women who met her and knew her through her stories were always specially cordial to her, and in several cases they had naïvely told her how pleasantly disappointed they were to find her such a very charming person despite her merciless pen. She knew that they could not reconcile her work and her, but she did not care. Only Genevieve, and perhaps the professor, understood, and Anne was quite content to have it so. If she had grown bitter in the last year, she prided herself on keeping the fact hidden except in her stories. And after all she had discovered a very profitable way of expressing her mind.

The local for Bantam Hill rumbled and clanged into Hammerton, and Anne deposited herself and her bag-

gage in the familiar low-backed seats with their coverings of worn red plush. Friendly faces smiled at her, as the train stopped at one little station after another, and women with market-baskets got in or out. Anne had not been away as long as she was accustomed to be when teaching, but somehow the time from June till late September seemed years, so complete had been her emancipation from care and carping poverty. She noticed, as she had never noticed before, how tired and fagged-out the women looked and how impatient some of them were with the little clinging hands at their skirts and the insistent, piping demands upon their attention. One wandering youngster, with a rosebud mouth and round blue eyes under a mop of uncombed hair, plumped himself down beside Anne, oblivious to the proximity of a pair of small earth-stained overalls and dusty boots and the stranger lady's pretty, dark silk gown. Anne gave him an orange and discovered her mistake only after he had embarked upon a juicy voyage. He pointed out the beauties of the landscape to her as he ate, leaning across her lap and dripping orange upon her with charming abandon. His mother rescued him just as he was snuggling up to Anne and rubbing a sticky fist into his eyes. She saw him carried off into the rainy twilight and stifled a sigh before she turned to her half-read book again. The brakeman, whose round, freckled face was quite familiar to Anne, came in and lighted the gas, slamming shut the little glass globes in a way that used to fascinate her as a child. The trip from Hammerton in those days had always seemed endless, for her mother had been occupied with Myrtle and Mildred, who would be tired and cross after a long day, and the burden of keeping still and taking care of the

innumerable packages had always fallen to Anne. She went back to her book.

The rain began to beat upon the windows, coming in gusts, which soon blurred the pane and made crooked little rivers down its bleary surface. Anne closed her book and put it in her suitcase. They were nearing Bantam Hill.

The car wheels thumped and clumped into a dull refrain, which Anne made up for herself into "Home at last, at last, at last," and then the train rumbled on to a siding and came to a pause. A few people peered out into the rain-drenched darkness; everybody seemed afraid to break the sudden silence by speaking; the slightest move seemed awkwardly obvious to every one in the car. Anne tried to realize that in a few moments they would reach the home station. She hoped old Simon would be there to take her home. She did not expect the family, for she had not allowed time to write them. She wished now that she had telephoned from Hammerton. Perhaps they would not care to have her surprise them.

The express swept by, having made its half-minute stop at Bantam Hill, and Anne's train gained speed, whistled, jolted and clattered on to the main tracks again, and in another minute was slowing down.

The round-faced brakeman called out the station, and then came for Anne's suitcase, just as he used to do.

"Some rain!" he remarked as she descended the steps of the car.

She looked a little dismayed at the fury of the storm. Darkness had shut down, the wind had risen, and the rain was pouring in torrents.

"Got somebody to meet you?" the brakeman inquired kindly.

"Oh, yes, thank you." Anne was left the next minute on the little covered platform, with the storm swirling her skirts about her and slapping her wet veil against her face. But the platform was not deserted. A short distance away a tall man in a heavy coat, with hat pulled low over his face, was bending over a slender figure in dripping oilskins. Anne had a feeling that the girl was pretty, although she could not see her face. They both turned and gave Anne a quick look at that moment, and she saw that the man dropped the girl's hands and turned about again. After a second they disappeared. By this time it became clear that old Simon did not care to expose his horse to such a storm. He was probably peacefully eating his supper half a mile down the road. Anne picked up her suitcase and started across the street for the village store. She could telephone home and trust that Edward was not at the hospital. It he could not meet her, Cy Whittredge would make some arrangement. As she struggled across the street in the blinding rain, she was aware that the man who had been on the platform was crossing too. He was alone now. When they stepped within the circle of light from Whittredge's store, she gave a little cry of surprise and stood facing him. It was Professor Bernays.

CHAPTER XXXI

ANNE'S heart sank when she realized that the mysterious man on the platform and Professor Bernays were the same person. There was not the slightest reason in the world why he should not stand in a public place and hold the hands of any girl he happened to like, but Anne could not help wishing that she had been mistaken about it. Besides, it was not like him to do such a thing. Perhaps he had just come in on the express and she had come down to meet him. But who was she, anyway? No wonder he was lingering unaccountably long in Bantam Hill. This little episode explained. Yet here he was crossing to Cy Whittredge's and what had he done with the girl? He would be at the door just a second before she was. He would open it and, realizing that it was she, would hold it for her, and then: "Good evening," said Anne, as coolly as if they had just met the day before.

He snatched off his hat and gripped her hand. She had never seen him so excited.

"Anne Carew! You are really here?"

"Yes, and very wet, thank you." She handed him her suitcase and stepped into the hot, bright store, where Cy Whittredge leaned over the counter and shook hands with her, staring in amazement over his half-spectacles at this stranger from New York.

"I want to telephone. May I?" she asked brightly.

Professor Bernays stepped a little closer to her.

"Will you let me do it for you?" he asked, with an eagerness that so slight a matter did not seem to warrant.

"Certainly, but if Edward is n't there, just telephone to Simon Kelly, because the storm is too bad for Mildred to come out."

He did not seem to heed her. She thought he seemed almost relieved to shut himself into the telephone booth away from the other two. He did not ask her if she wished to talk with them at home; nor did he come out when he had rung one number. He made another call, and then she distinctly heard him ask for the some number again. When he stepped out of the booth, he smiled at Anne engagingly. He seemed to know that his conversation over the telephone had been disappointingly low for Cy's waiting ear.

"I understand that your little sister came up here to meet you, after all. She must be around here somewhere. I 'll just step across and see if she has gone into Belinda's."

Anne looked at him squarely, but he met her eyes unflinchingly. She could not read his face.

"All right," she assented. "But I don't see why Mildred is here when she did n't know I was coming."

Dr. Bernays ignored this, merely hurrying on with his own information.

"Nell is in the shed. I 'll bring them both along if you 'll just wait."

"Wal, Miss Mildred certainly had courage to come out to-night," Cy began as the door closed on the doctor's tall, square figure.

"Mildred never lacks courage," Anne said carelessly. "How is Mrs. Whittredge?" But she hardly heard the

voluble account of that lady's last attack of hay fever. She was trying to explain away the mystery that surrounded the little scene at the station. She felt convinced without knowing why that the girl with Dr. Bernays had been Mildred. It was in vain that she tried to focus her attention upon Cy Whittredge's innocent gossip.

"Yes, it was too bad that the Dilloways were to move." But what was Mildred doing there in the rain when she did not expect Anne?

"No, she had not forgotten Bantam Hill. She was not in the least famous, not in the least."

Had the girl come down to meet Dr. Bernays, who had just arrived perhaps on the other train? Why had he held both her hands, he who was always so undemonstrative? She would not have believed him capable of it if she had not seen it with her own eyes. Why should he try to hide the fact that he had been with her?

"Yes, she was feeling very well. New York agreed with her. And she hoped that he was quite as usual." Why should she have been alarmed about Mildred's infatuation for Chips? Mildred was slyer than they thought. If the family could not coax her from her first love, evidently some one else could. She was using Chips as a blind. The thing had been done before.

Anne realized that she was becoming very angry. And the more she reminded herself that she had not the slightest right to be angry, the hotter her cheeks became, and the more she wished that Cy Whittredge would cease his foolish chatter and leave her alone.

"There 's the perfessor now. Got your sister in with him. She don't mind rain, not in those oilskins, no more 'n a little duck."

"No, she does n't. Remember me to Mrs. Whittredge. I will try to call soon."

Anne rose and stood ready with her suitcase. Cy scanned her with a twinkling eye.

"Skirts don't get in the way these days like they used to, do they?" he chuckled as he took in Anne's short dress and slender, high-cut boot. She tried to smile, but she longed to say something rude to the volatile old man. The door opened, and Dr. Bernays came in, bringing along a gust of rainy wind.

"All ready?" he asked. He picked up her suitcase. In the midst of the howling wind, which swept around the corner of the store, he bent to Anne and said hurriedly, "Don't ask any questions. You 'll understand later." Then he helped Anne into the back seat and put her bag in after her. Anne leaned forward toward the little figure in the oilskins, sitting hunched so pathetically on the front seat. So it had been Mildred, after all.

"Have n't you a kiss for me, Milly?"

Mildred put her arm about Anne's neck and hugged her close for a moment, Anne's cheek against her wet face.

"Good night," said Professor Bernays, in a tone that Anne had never before heard. She thrilled at the wistful tenderness of it. It matched the look that she had seen in his eyes that night in Lakewood. He was looking at Mildred, she decided, for his next words were to her. They were low, but quite audible.

"I will keep everything. Don't worry."

And then began the drive which Anne never forgot. Nellie plodded and slipped and stumbled along the broken, rain-swept roads, and Mildred, absolutely silent,

seemed hardly to hold the reins sometimes. She was half crouching in the corner of the front seat, and before they had gone far, Anne saw that she was crying, not stormily, but very quietly, with a kind of hopelessness that went to Anne's heart.

"Is Edward at the hospital?" It was the only question Anne could seem to think of after she had asked about her mother and Myrtle and had received monosyllables in reply.

"No," came the same expressionless answer.

"My dear! And he let you come out in all this storm?"

"He did n't know it." Mildred spoke with a trace of spirit now.

"But what will he say?"

"Oh, I suppose Arthur telephoned him about it."

"Arthur!" Anne caught her breath.

Mildred paid no attention to the exclamation, although she must have heard it.

Just before they reached the farm-house, she turned and spoke to Anne. Her words were mechanical and deliberate.

"I did n't come up to meet you. I was going to spend the night up-town with Alma Harris, but when you came, Professor Bernays called for me and told me you were here."

"I see. I 'll remember." Anne's tone gave Mildred something to think about. And then Mildred turned into the big yard, and Anne saw the yellow light from the sitting-room window streaming across the sodden lawn.

As they swung into the yard by the side door, a windowshade was pushed up and Myrtle's face looked out.

Then the door opened, and Mrs. Carew, with the old, familiar brown shawl over her stooping shoulders, stood in the lighted doorway. She peered anxiously out into the gloom, her eyes behind her spectacles bright with anticipation. As Anne kissed the thin cheeks, a wave of tenderness for her commonplace little mother swept over her and almost made her forget the forlornness of her homecoming through the storm and the mystery of Arthur Bernays and Mildred.

Myrtle was beside her mother in a minute, her fair hair a little frowsy, as if she had recently been lying down, her coloring not so vivid as formerly or her smile so sweet. She kissed Anne warmly, however, and bade Edward take her suitcase from her, exclaiming with dismay as she saw how wet Anne's clothes were. Then she led the girl to the fire, and Anne warmed her hands at the familiar hearth while her eyes traveled from the well-worn books on the shelves across the room to the brown and yellow sampler, which had held the place of honor over the fireplace since Grandmother Carew hung it there when she helped her daughter-in-law settle the farm-house thirty years before.

In the midst of the excitement of Anne's coming Mildred's flight from home was overlooked. Little was said to her when she made her curt explanation, and Anne thought she noticed just there a change in the manner of treating Mildred, which perhaps accounted for the girl's behavior. If they were taking the attitude that she was unmanageable, they might look for trouble. Anne could have told them that.

They openly rejoiced in Anne's altered looks, and Myrtle admired her clothes as of old. It would all have seemed like a year ago, even to Edward's hovering

in the background, had it not been for Mildred's stricken little face and Myrtle's new dignity as she moved, large and matronly, about the house.

When Mildred had taken off her coat and hat, she slipped into a chair at the table beside Anne. Her face was white, and her lips quivered when Anne looked at her searchingly, but she summoned a wan little smile as she said:

"I haven't had any supper either, Anne."

"Why didn't you come down when we called you?" Mrs. Carew asked, from her accustomed place by the fire. She had heard Mildred's first brave attempt at conversation.

Anne flew to the rescue.

"Let her alone, Mother."

A fierce championship of Mildred was springing up in her. The very sight of her mother's sharpening face and Myrtle's familiar selfishness had roused feelings that she had not had for months. She could understand Mildred's rebellion perfectly, even though she had no notion of what the child had planned to do. She knew that she would hear about it all sometime, for Mildred had never yet failed to trust her. If the child was actually in love with Professor Bernays, then well and good. At least it was better than to have her deceived by Chips. Anne ate her supper under the appraising eyes of her family. Now and then she was startled by a remark from them that seemed to display a kind of shamed pride in her, as if they rejoiced at her success, even though they felt obliged to protest against it. They were a little distant with her, nevertheless, and gradually she saw that they were afraid of her. Myrtle served her supper as daintily as she knew how, and Anne

caught her in an admonitory glance at Edward, who was about to light a disreputable old pipe.

Anne was inwardly amused.

"Please don't mind me," she said.

"Mildred, sit up straight, the way Anne does," was Mrs. Carew's next contribution to the conversation.

Mildred flushed pitifully, but obeyed with such surprising docility that Anne's heart ached for her. She had not dreamed of such a change in the child. She wished that she had never gone away.

After she had eaten, she helped Myrtle clear away the things. Mildred did not stir from her place till Anne whispered to her as she came near:

"Come, dear, pretend to be happy. We all have to, you know."

"I know." Mildred answered languidly, but she rose and carried her own plate out to the kitchen.

Afterward they all sat around the fire, and Anne tried to keep them interested in her housekeeping experiences and the good times she had been having with Genevieve. She painted these last with an eye upon Mildred, but the girl was too listless to encourage her to go on.

"Why doesn't Genevieve marry?" asked Myrtle. "She dresses well and is very good-looking."

"Her mind doesn't seem to work in that direction. Some people's don't, you know." Anne pretended not to notice the effect of her words. She toyed with a bit of silk upon her sleeve for a second, and then went on carelessly, "Of course lots of the men who take her to all these places would marry her in a moment if she would have them, but she evidently hasn't met the right one."

"Goodness, Anne, you sound like a social butterfly."

"Do I? Well, I 'm not. I limit myself to only three nights out in the week. The rest of the time I won't even dine later than eight, and I generally creep off to bed about ten, to be fresh for work the next day."

Myrtle gasped audibly. Anne enjoyed the gasp, but she did not allow even the flicker of a smile to show in her eyes as she looked up at her younger sister. "It 's necessary to be strict about one's leisure time or there won't be any left. If I motored off to dinner in the country every evening, where would my work be?"

"But who takes you to all these places?" It was Mrs. Carew who spoke, leaning forward with a wondering eye upon her offspring.

"Who?" Anne spread her hands prettily. "Oh, lots of people," she answered.

"Genevieve's friends?" inquired Myrtle, a little cuttingly.

"Dear me, no. There are different sets, of course. The Merricks are awfully good to me and they know loads of interesting people. Then there is a good deal of fun attached to success, you know. You 'd be surprised to know how many people want to make arrangements to meet me," Anne finished whimsically.

By this time she saw that Mildred was listening. She rose with a pretty rustle of silk, yawned, and dropped one hand upon Mildred's shoulder as she sat in a low chair by the fire.

"Come up-stairs with me, honey. I 'm tired to death."

"It 's only nine o'clock," Mrs. Carew said accusingly.

"Is that all? It seems much later," was Anne's

peaceful rejoinder. Then she turned to Edward. "Did you take my suitcase up-stairs, Brother dear?"

He turned red and looked at Myrtle.

"No, I guess I did n't," he finally answered. Anne's sisterly way of addressing him was charming, of course, but he could not quite bring himself to enjoy it. It was the evidence which she was giving him that she no longer cared for him except as Myrtle's husband. He was settled enough to be glad, and sufficiently alive to Anne's attractiveness to be sorry. He made his exit into the grateful darkness of the kitchen, where he found the suitcase and carried it up-stairs. He thoughtfully lighted her lamp also, but she did not think of thanking him when she rustled down the hall, with Mildred tucked under her arm protectingly.

"You'll have to unstrap it," she ordered, "and the key always sticks." She tossed him a little silver key, which she took from a jade-topped mesh bag, dangling from her arm.

He went on his knees obediently and wrestled with the straps. Then he unlocked it, flinging back the lid and disclosing a bewildering array of daintiness. A delicate, hardly discernible perfume, which reminded him of Anne, floated up from the open bag. He remembered suddenly how fragrant had been Anne's hair the night, that one night, when he had kissed her. But he was a loyal soul, and he turned away from the room without even another look at the girl he had once wanted to marry. Anne liked him the better for his indifference. She closed the door and drew Mildred down beside her in the big chair by the window. As the rain beat upon the little panes of glass, Mildred shrank back and hid her face on Anne's shoulder.

"Oh! Oh!" she breathed.

"If you could only tell me, dear."

But Mildred was silent. Anne held her without speaking, till finally the girl slipped from her arms and stood before her trembling.

"I can't stay here. I can't tell you, and I shall want to if I don't leave you." She made an expressive little gesture toward Anne and her belongings. "I know why you got out of it all. You thought nobody needed you. Well, if you could have seen us since, you 'd have changed your mind." With that she was gone.

Anne undressed slowly, and was brushing out her hair when she heard Myrtle's heavy step on the stairs. Somebody paused outside her door, so she called, "Come in," and turned to see Myrtle standing a little hesitatingly on the threshold.

"Do you mind being interrupted, Anne?" she asked timidly.

"Not at all. Come in. It 's quite like old times." Anne's tone was cordial as she drew up a chair for Myrtle, but Myrtle was not satisfied.

"It 's not like old times at all," she contradicted, but her tone was not meant to antagonize. "You are too chilly and sweet and polite to have it like old times. Mother is scared half to death of you."

Anne laughed merrily, tied the broad sash of her kimono about her waist and dropped cross-legged onto a cushion near her suitcase. "How interesting! You talk, and I 'll unpack." If the shaking out and hanging up of dainty things that Anne had brought from New York was done purposely to impress Myrtle, Anne was successful in concealing the fact. She chatted non-

committally about many things and gave no chance for confidences of any kind.

Myrtle sat uncomfortably in the stiff chair that Anne had set for her. She compared her own lusterless hair with Anne's shining braids, and noted in the glass across the room that Anne looked the younger of the two. Myrtle, for the first time since her engagement, was honestly dissatisfied with the comparison between herself and Anne.

Anne gave her no opportunity to complain, however. She talked pleasantly, but incessantly, with a forced gaiety that Myrtle did not observe. Anne was trying not to think about Mildred and Arthur Bernays and all that had happened that evening. On the bottom of the satin-lined suitcase lay a copy of the magazine with Anne's last story. She took it out and handed it to Myrtle.

"I don't suppose you have seen this yet? Take it and read it before you see me again, and then if you don't care to own your eldest sister, why I have a return ticket for the city."

Myrtle flushed.

"I wrote rather frankly about the other story, because I knew you ought to know."

"Indeed you did write frankly," Anne murmured.

"But you may get your share of the legacy after all. I think mother has n't felt quite right about that."

"Oh, but you see,"—Anne's hands fluttered about to indicate her possessions,—"I really don't need any money, thank you."

Then Myrtle did an unusual thing. She stooped and kissed Anne.

"I knew that was what you were trying to show us all the time. Well, Anne, mother needs you. She is n't happy at all lately, and I don't suit her as you did. She won't tell you, that 's all. I 'll read the story, but I don't want to. You are nicer than your stories, Anne."

Then Myrtle, too, went out and down the hall to her own room.

Anne knew that her next visitor would be her mother. Mrs. Carew was very apt to come up to see her just before she went to bed, if Anne had been away a long time. It was only a few moments after Myrtle had gone that her mother pushed open the door of the now darkened room and looked cautiously in.

Anne raised herself on her elbow.

"What shall I do about these windows?" she asked. "I can't raise one of them without deluging the room with rain, and I must have some air."

"Leave your door open, and I 'll raise the window in the hall. The wind ain't comin' this way. It 's a terrible night."

"It surely is." Anne lay still and wondered if her mother would kiss her good night. The older woman was standing in the doorway, her familiar figure looking a little more bent beneath the knitted shawl that Anne knew so well.

"You don't seem natural, Anne, with all this gay life and these fine clothes, but I 'm glad you're home. I think Myrtle needs you, although she never says nothin' about it. She 's always depended on you a good deal. I guess I have, too, but I did n't realize it till you went off this last time."

Anne laughed. She put out one bare white arm to

draw her mother toward the bed, but covered up the action by saying carelessly:

"Eyes all right still, Mother?"

"Oh, yes, I don't believe I 'm goin' to have any trouble for a long time. I 'm a lot more worried over Myrtle than I be over myself."

"Never mind, dear. Everything will be all right." It was the old Anne speaking, but her heart misgave her as she thought of Mildred and her unknown trouble.

Mrs. Carew bent over the bed and kissed Anne's cheek.

"I ain't nearly so worried now you 've come home for a while," she said. "My, ain't your face soft!"

Anne laughed again. They really needed her. That was clear. Her heart grew mysteriously light. She listened to her mother's footsteps, tiptoeing out as she used to do when Anne was a little girl. She heard her raise the window in the hall and put a weight against the door to hold it open. Then in the darkness she lay and thought about Mildred and her lost bloom, of the way she spoke of "Arthur," and of the look of the two as he stood in the rain holding both her hands and gazing down so intently upon her that he did not even notice Anne as she alighted from the train.

Anne was ashamed of herself as she thought of the gaiety that she had affected through the evening, just to hold off everybody from thinking that she had not changed. She did not care any more if they came to her as they used to come and demanded more than ever. Evidently that was to be her mission in life, as well as her writing. Success, possibly; real happiness, never. She had hoped for it in Edward and lost it. She had wanted it from Arthur Bernays, although she had never acknowledged it even to herself, and now that

was all over, too. In Anne's mind, almost unknown to herself, had entered now and then a shadowy vision of a house that was to be all her own, of softly toned rooms, and a dear intimacy and comfort that was of her planning and hers alone. In the sheltered comeliness of that dream-home Anne had seen herself moving, loved and shielded as she had never been before, drawing down the shades at night against the world without, spreading the white cloth or bending low over a little crib for a touch which thrilled her with rapture even in her dream. Anne had been amazed at herself sometimes, when she had allowed her thoughts to carry her far from reality. To-night she demolished the shadow-home ruthlessly, for there was a reason why it hurt her to think of it any longer.

She wondered if Mildred would tell her soon the thing that seemed to make her so strangely sad. It occurred to her that she might better go to Mildred, for there would be no confidences otherwise, and the girl might need her sorely. Anne was determined to help at last, as if to compensate for all the months of neglect. She waited till the house was very still and then stole down to Mildred's room. But when she opened the door she found the bed undisturbed. A sudden, swift fear stabbed Anne. She gathered her kimono about her and sped softly down the front stairs, her slippered feet making hardly a sound as she ran. Indeed, her approach was so noiseless that she found Mildred before the girl was aware of her presence. It was an unspeakable relief to find her sitting curled up before the dying fire, her eyes dangerously bright as they looked out from beneath her shadowing hair.

"What 's the matter, dear?" Anne asked, trying to

be quite natural, as she dropped another stick on the fire and sat down on the arm of Mildred's chair.

"Nothing." Mildred made no welcoming movement.

"I was so afraid you had run off and left us," Anne continued lightly. "I felt all over your bed before I would believe my eyes."

"Oh, there 's no use in going away again." Mildred's last word made Anne look down at her a bit sharply, but the girl's steady gaze never wavered from the heart of the fire. Anne sighed a little and swung one slippered foot back and forth.

"Why did you ever leave New York? There is no fun here," Mildred said after a pause. She seemed to be trying to think of something that would interest Anne.

"Well, you are here, and you used to be fun."

"I? Oh!" After that there was another long pause. Then Mildred's arm stole up about Anne's neck, and Anne's heart warmed to feel that after all she was to know her little sister's trouble. But all that Mildred said was: "I can't tell you anything yet, Anne, and maybe not ever. But Arthur Bernays did something today that changed everything for us all."

Anne waited a minute, then she said:

"Have you forgotten Chips?"

Mildred's arm slid down from Anne's neck, and she dropped her head.

"I never expect to see him again," she whispered.

"And that is all you can tell me, dear?"

Mildred nodded without speaking.

Anne got up from the arm of the big chair, and bent to fix the fire for the night.

"Well, I 'm glad about Chips," she said crisply.

"Don't say anything to the rest." Mildred's tone was imploring.

"All right, honey. Can't you go to bed now and sleep?"

"Perhaps so." It was not till afterward that Anne understood the look of horror on Mildred's face as she stood a moment in the dark hall listening to the howling of the wind and the rain.

CHAPTER XXXII

ANNE CAREW had been home a week. The village telephones had ceased to buzz with the news, and the trade in Cy Whittredge's store, which had picked up amazingly for the first few days, dropped off to its regular amount. Only the arrival of the October number of the "Columbia Monthly" tended to add its bit to the popular excitement, for on the outside sheet, in flaunting letters of red, appeared the name of the prize story, "Thankful for Thirty," and beneath, in lettering almost equally large, "By Anne Carew."

That day everybody took home a copy of the "Columbia Monthly"; at least almost everybody must have, for when Dr. Bernays went in to get his copy, he found that the entire supply was exhausted.

"Just sold the last one to Miss Hetty Noble. She was aimin' to put two in the library, but she said she 's changed her mind. She was still lookin' for Anne's best work to come, but she thought 't wa' n't come yet."

"What do *you* think of it?" Dr. Bernays asked Cy. A careful observer might have said that there was a little anxiety in the doctor's voice.

"Why, I think it 's a pretty ordinary piece of work, myself," Cy answered laconically. "I always thought Anne had a lot more brain. Don't seem to me as if there was enough there to win any prize. My wife thinks it 's real simple-like. Too bad you ain't read it yet. I 'll bring over our copy for you long about

eight o'clock when I come by on the way from supper."

"Thank you. I shall be much obliged. So you think it is n't a very great story?"

"Now I don't want to go hurtin' the little girl's feelin's," Cy protested earnestly. "If she 's satisfied, then we are, but a lot of us, we 've been a-sayin' it 's a shame Anne could n't have gone around more and found other folks to put in besides us poor old stupid people. Seems funny, though, she did n't use any stuff outside of here, except one poor nutty feller that thought he was a dude."

"Do you think she wrote of Bantam Hill?" The doctor's eyes were keen and very kind as they met Cy's wide-spectacled orbs of palest blue.

"Surest thing you know; that 's a home-grown product. Ain't I the one that sits around winter Sundays with a straw hat on? And ain't it old Jo Tasker that 's always goin' in on folks at meal-times? I been a-thinkin' Jo might not jest fancy that, but I don't s'pose Anne thought. Good Lord, it won't hurt him none, and Anne got a lot out of it."

Dr. Bernays could not have explained why his hand went so suddenly over the counter to meet Cy's surprised and horny paw, but he covered up the unusual friendliness by a hearty:

"Well, I see you are as glad as I am that Anne has struck success. She owes a lot to Bantam Hill."

"We 'll soon be owin' somethin' to her. The papers say she 's quite a genius," volunteered Sam Salt from the bench in the corner.

"Hush! Here she comes."

Anne knew that they had been talking about her as soon as she entered the store. She nodded to them

brightly, and attended to her errand, trying not to be aware of the friendly eyes. Dr. Bernays joined her at the door, as she had hoped he would. Into her manner toward him crept a slight, indefinable chill, and yet it was only the reserve with which she sought to protect herself against the temptation of renewing the old friendly intimacy. The scene at the railroad station had never been explained, and Mildred apparently wished the matter dropped. Nevertheless, Anne's eyes were full of welcome as she turned to him.

"You are a stranger. We were hoping to see you some night this week."

"I 'm getting ready to go away, so I 've been unusually busy." He did not look at her as he answered, and she wondered if he purposely avoided meeting her eyes.

"I 'm sorry you are going so soon," she said evenly. "Mildred says you have been very good to her this summer." She regretted this last as soon as it was uttered. It might almost be taken as a challenge.

"You asked me to look out for her," he said simply.

His tone made the words a subtle compliment. Truly Dr. Bernays was getting on. Mildred's tutoring must have been fruitful.

"We are all obliged to you," said Anne, a little stiffly.

There were so many things she wanted to say. It seemed as if she must talk to him as freely as she used to in the old days. Her story, which he had just seen in print, was it nothing to him? The length of her visit, did he not care? The whole friendly give and take of experiences since the last meeting, she missed it more than she would acknowledge even to herself.

Almost as if he read her thoughts he said:

"I know nothing about you any more. You never wrote to me, you see, and I have n't seen as much of your family as I intended to."

So Mildred and he had talked of other things!

"I never thought of writing," she said simply.

"No, I could n't expect it. Although once in a while I allowed myself to hope for a few lines to the effect that you had gone over to my doctrine."

"If you mean in regard to my work," Anne answered slowly, "then I think I have."

"You mean—" He hesitated. They were turning now into the road that led through the pines. Anne felt a little thrill of gladness that he was going to walk home with her.

"I mean that I 'll write a different kind of story in future. I 've thought it all out. You helped some, but mostly it 's been the way the people at home feel. They are my own people after all, and I must let other things go and think of them."

"I 'm glad." His voice rang in the quiet pines. Anne looked at him quickly.

"The people here are n't hurt or offended," she said at once. "I think it 's because they don't quite see the irony in 'Thankful for Thirty,' that I am beginning to realize how good and simple they are. They really can't see much to my work anyway, but they don't want to hurt my feelings."

She laughed a little, but her voice was very sweet with an appreciation that, Dr. Bernays knew, she had not always had.

"They are very proud of you," he agreed, "and so loyal. Why you should hear Cy Whittredge talk. I

believe he would let you write anything you wanted to about him if he thought it would please you. But then, I should do the same myself."

"You?"

"I 'm not even good copy, am I?" he asked whimsically. "Just an ordinary old college professor who broke away too late to find any niche in the world."

"Why, Dr. Bernays!" Anne found herself unable to say more. He did not break the silence of the next few minutes. They walked on in the gathering darkness, the pines ahead of them silhouetted against a crimson sky.

He broke off a dead twig and began throwing it away piece by piece. When the last bit was gone, Anne shivered a little and unconsciously quickened her steps. She felt that she could not stand it for him to say anything about Mildred, and yet she knew that he was trying to tell her something. He noticed that she was hurrying.

"You would rather I went away without saying anything to you," he began slowly. "I can see that you and your plans for the future could not possibly include me."

"*My* plans?" she echoed.

"Whose else?"

Anne stood almost still and looked at him. Her face was glowing as he had never seen it before. He came nearer to her.

"My dear, I 've been trying not to tell you how much I want you. I could n't believe that there was any hope for me. I knew I was queer, long before Mildred told me, and I never felt at ease with you till last spring, and then I spoiled it all by scolding you. I 've seemed

hard and unsympathetic, but all the time I 've wanted the very best for you. I don't know when I began to love you. Most people can tell, but I never could. You 've just grown into my life till I can't imagine what the days are going to be without you, and yet I have n't anything to give you that is worth your while. I nearly told you last June how much I wanted you, and when I left you in Lakewood I had all I could do to keep from taking you in my arms and telling you that you should not go to New York and that you must be happy before you could ever write well. You have never asked me to do anything for you till this last time when I promised to take care of Mildred. I suppose she has n't forgiven me for keeping her from Chips the other night, but I would have done anything to save her for you."

"You kept her from Chips?" Anne said slowly.

"Has n't she told you?"

"She will tell me. But—but I thought it was something about *you.*"

"It will be about me. I 'm afraid she could n't forgive me at once."

"What did you tell her?"

"That he had a wife living. I had just got proof. You see he was to meet Mildred on that express."

Anne shuddered.

"How can I thank you?" But before the words were out Anne knew how she could thank him.

"Are you sure you care about me, Anne?" he asked as he drew her close. "I don't want to spoil your career, sweetheart."

Anne lifted her face to his. Her eyes were shining.

"It 's worth everything I could ever do, just to hear you call me that."

"I don't know how to make love very well," he told her ruefully. "You see I never did it before."

"You have thought of the very most satisfying thing you could say to a girl," Anne whispered while he held her tight against him. The sun sank from sight, and through the trees in back of them a round yellow harvest moon smiled upon them. Anne gently released herself and laughed at her own absent-mindedness as she picked up her parcel of sewing-silk from the pine needles.

"We must go home," she said. "My heroines have always left off right here in the story, and I hardly know what comes next in real life."

Suddenly he caught her and turned her around toward him.

"Anne," he said fiercely. "If you don't love me with all your heart, I want to know it *now*. I don't know whether I 'm jealous or not, but I 've been a long time finding the girl I wanted, and if there is any doubt about her wanting me, I must know it now."

The eyes that Anne lifted to him were clear for his reading.

"This Merrick fellow?" he questioned, his arm still about her.

Her gaze never wavered.

"I did n't love him, but I was very lonely sometimes, Arthur, and once I was almost tempted."

She felt his hold upon her tighten.

"Edward Sewall?"

Anne's eyes fell for a second.

"I gave him up to Myrtle," she said. "He wanted her more than he did me."

"Is it all right now? Absolutely all right now?"

"Arthur,"—Anne's voice was vibrant with happiness, but into her eyes had crept a little mischievous gleam,—"you are the most unique lover I ever had. Let that sink into your jealous soul."

"Why?" He bent his head closer to hear her answer.

When it came it was whispered against his coat:

"You haven't kissed me yet."

There was a second's silence and then he found her lips.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"HAVE you put the beans a-soak, Anne?" Mrs. Carew came out of the sitting-room with a stocking still adorning her right hand, one pair of spectacles pushed up over her forehead, another pair low on her nose, thus achieving a six-eyed appearance that was unique, if not terrifying.

"Beans? Laws-a-massy!" Anne threw up her hands. "Is it Friday night we do be havin'? I had forgotten them clean, ma'am, but I 'll do them at once."

"The idea of a lady authoress putting beans a-soak!" Myrtle said indignantly. "Let me, Anne."

" 'T is n't goin' to hurt Anne none to come down to hard pan now and then," Mrs. Carew said firmly.

Anne laughed with glee as she disappeared under the pantry molding-board in search of the beans.

"Mother's efficiency in keeping house consists in putting things where you can't get at them," Myrtle complained.

"Cheer up, Myrtle. I 'm the one that 's in the potato basket; you 're not." Anne emerged in a moment with the bean-bucket.

"Is n't Anne happy!" Mildred said a bit wistfully. "You have the real merry heart, Anne."

> "'A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad tires in a mile-a,'"

quoted Anne, with a flourish, as she dipped into the bucket with her tin-cup. "See how I know my Shake-

speare. But I have n't always had the merry heart, Mildred. That comes,''—she paused and flushed a little, but finished glowingly,—''it comes with experience and—''

''Success?'' ventured the younger girl, watching Anne with serious eyes.

''No; *love,*'' Anne replied softly. ''Success can never do it.''

Mildred was silent. Myrtle went into the other room to set the table, and Mrs. Carew was busy in the sitting-room over her stocking.

''Some people have to wait a long time before things straighten out for them, don't they?''

Anne shook her head.

''No, indeed. They are asking too much if they want everything straight. That was the trouble with me. I thought if things did n't sail along smoothly every minute that I deserved a lot of credit for not complaining.''

''You did n't complain, Anne. I think I would have minded you sooner and more willingly about everything if you had n't given up Edward. That seemed so weak and foolish that I found myself mistrusting your judgment.''

''Mildred,''—Anne put a hand on each of the girl's shoulders and looked straight into her eyes,—''although I did n't always see the way, I was trying to find not the man who was in love with me because he had n't met any one he liked better, but the man who was just intended for me, and somewhere, sometime would find me out. Edward was n't that man.''

''Anne, your eyes are like stars.''

''Are they? I 'm very happy, Milly dear.''

''Oh, Anne, may I guess? It 's about—''

"Put the beans in that big white dipper, Milly. Good evening, John. Your supper will be ready in ten minutes. Is Mr. Sewall at home yet?"

"Yes, sir, you bet he is." Edward himself came striding in from the little back hall. "Supper nearly ready, Anne? I 'm starved."

"It 's the funniest thing," Myrtle said, "the minute Anne gets here, we all make believe she is housekeeper, no matter who 's been here before."

"That 's a compliment," Anne said, "but once I found it an awful bore to have everything depend on me."

"You did n't show it, except when I bothered you."

"Oh, I showed it all the time. Arthur told me once that I did n't make a bit good martyr."

"Arthur told you?" echoed Myrtle, coming back into the kitchen. "You and Mildred have certainly adopted Professor Bernays, have n't you?"

"Somebody ought to adopt him," said Mildred, stanchly.

"You have forgiven him then?" Anne said softly as the rest went into the dining-room.

"There was never anything to forgive." Mildred did not look at Anne. After supper she came, however, with Anne's thick sweater in her hands.

"Put this on and walk with me a little way," she pleaded. "I want to talk to you."

"All right, but wait till the dishes are done, honey."

"Edward and I will do the dishes," Myrtle volunteered. "Anne is n't going to be here long, and she must n't work all the time."

"Anne is n't going to be here long?" Mrs. Carew said tremulously. "Well, I should like to know why she can't give up New York and write at home."

"It 's too soon after supper to discuss my life career," Anne said gaily, but she kissed her mother before she went out.

"Glad you really want me, Mother," she said gratefully.

As she stepped out into the keen October air she turned to Mildred half-hesitatingly.

"Do you mind if we walk toward the village, Milly? Then if Dr. Bernays comes, we shall meet him."

"You don't mind?" she said again as there was no immediate answer.

"I 'll try not to. I don't want to be a horrid, jealous little cat, but it does seem as if just as I had found you, I was going to lose you again."

"No, you are n't going to lose me, Milly. I may even live right here at Bantam Hill all my life."

"You are in love with Dr. Bernays, are n't you, Anne?"

"Yes, dear." Then Anne's tender arm went about Mildred's neck as the two sisters swung into step down the shadowy road. Anne hugged her little sister up tight, as she added, "And I 'm going to take such care of you, dear, that you 'll find the road to the merry heart just as I found it, only with not so much wandering."

"I think I 've been a good way already on the wrong road," Mildred said plaintively.

"You know that 's something you have never told me about."

"Oh, there 's nothing to tell, Anne, that is n't cheap and shameful. I hate to think of it even now. Why,

that night that you came home so unexpectedly, I might have—I might have—''

''Yes, dear?''

''I might have been miles away on the fast express if it had n't been for Arthur Bernays. Has n't he told you?''

''He thought you had told me, and when he found that you had n't, he did n't say very much.''

''He was wonderful to me that night, Anne. I never dreamed he could be so fine. He did n't say much to me; there was n't time, but I think the very little that he did say is burned into my brain.''

''I knew there was something wrong that night, but I did n't suspect the right thing at first. You see, I saw you standing there—''

''You did? On the station platform? What did you think?''

''I thought—well, I thought perhaps my turn to be happy had n't come.''

''You see it had. It 's mine that has n't come. I try to forget about him, Anne, but I can't seem to realize that he is n't good. I knew you never liked him, but I thought that need n't mean that he had n't any right to make love to me.''

''You are not sorry that you did n't go with him?'' Anne stopped short and turned Mildred's face toward hers.

''No, oh, no; I 'm glad. There were things that I understood after Arthur talked to me that I had n't understood before.''

''Here he comes,'' Anne said softly, but he heard her.

As they turned and swung into step together after a cheery greeting, Mildred said seriously:

"We were just talking about you, Arthur, and I have told Anne what you did for me that night."

"I should certainly like to know what you said to her," Anne returned, trying to speak lightly.

He pressed her hand as it lay in the curve of his arm.

"I 'll tell you when I find you trying to elope with somebody," he said.

The sitting-room was warm and cheerful when they reached the farm-house. Edward met them at the door, a good-natured smile upon his ruddy face.

"To think that Anne has to go out and bring in her callers by main force."

"I 'm bringing him in for good," Anne said, as she turned to her lover.

"Well, say, that 's an informal way to announce an engagement." Edward held out his hand, nevertheless, and shook Arthur's heartily. All doubt of his sincerity vanished when he said, "Well, Bernays, since I could n't have Anne myself, I 'll gladly hand her over to you."

"What 's that?" inquired Mrs. Carew, coming in just in time to realize that she had missed something.

"I 'm engaged, Mother." Anne spoke happily, but her eyes were misty. The thing seemed like a dream after all.

"You are? Well, I declare, I did n't imagine you 'd ever do anything so sensible!" Mrs. Carew adjusted her spectacles and beamed upon Arthur Bernays.

"Are you engaged, too?" she said.

"I expect so," he answered, his eyes twinkling.

"Arthur, I never thought you 'd be such a peach," Mildred cried impulsively.

"I 'm glad you approve of me at last," he said, and

Mildred flushed scarlet as she recalled the time when she had not approved of him.

"He does n't quite approve of *me* yet," Anne said in mock humility. "He is all ready to block out the kind of story I am to write in future."

"I sha' n't have to," he answered, and his eyes told her more than he dared to say.

"Why not?" she teased.

He lingered with her in the dim hall after the others had gone into the sitting-room.

"What is your honest opinion of the world in general?" he asked, looking down into her upturned face.

"It could n't be improved," Anne declared, laughing.

"All right. That 's why," he answered her question of a minute before. And then he proved that he needed no more instruction in the gentle art of making love.

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